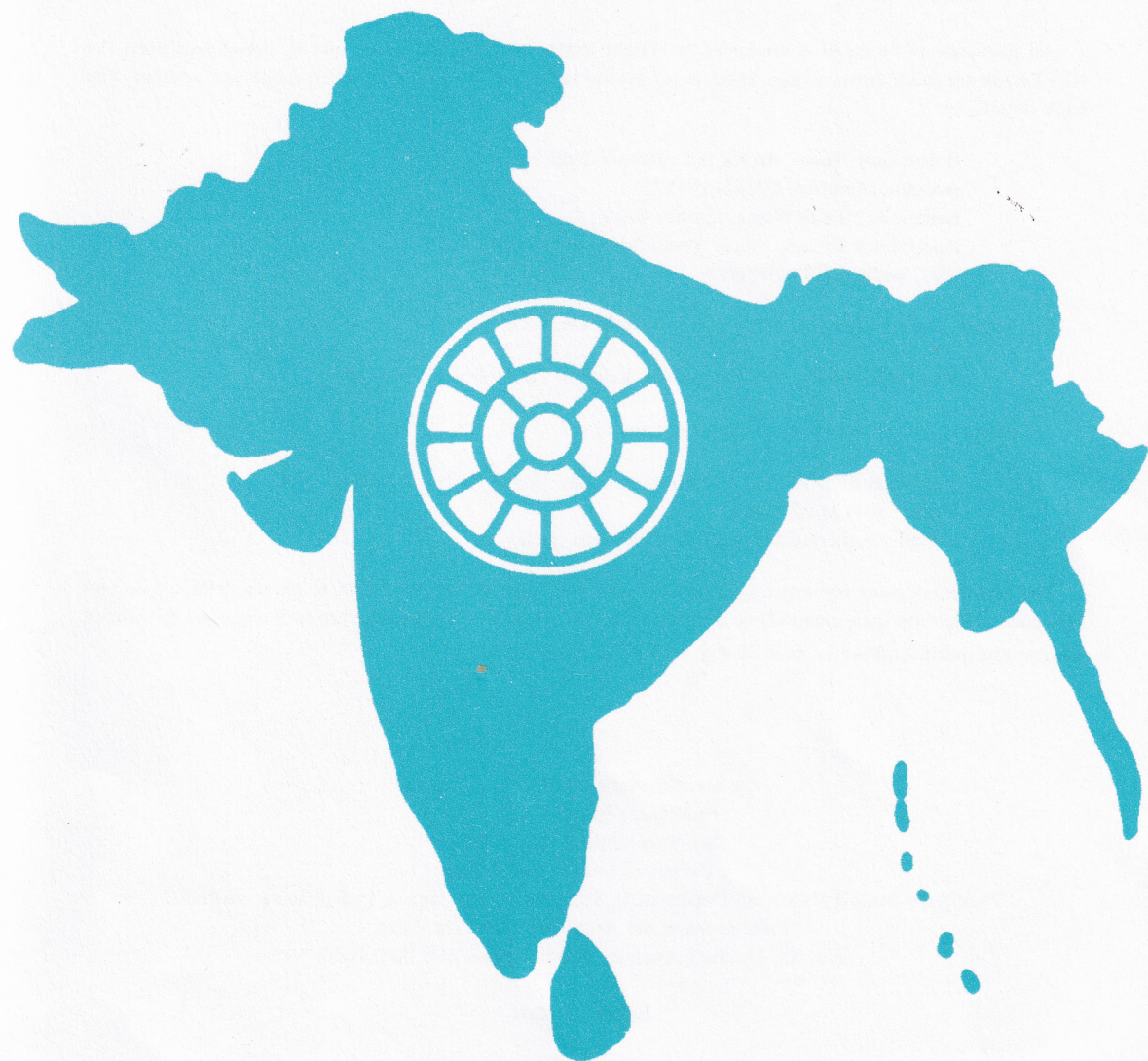


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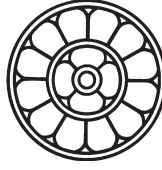
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JANUARY 2023

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM
PONDICHERRY
INDIA



Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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Vol. LXXVI

No. 1

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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‘TOO GREAT WAS HER DEMAND, TOO PURE HER FORCE’

. . . But mid this world, these hearts that answered her call,
None could stand up her equal and her mate.
In vain she stooped to equal them with her heights,
Too pure that air was for small souls to breathe.
These comrade selves to raise to her own wide breadths
Her heart desired and fill with her own power
That a diviner Force might enter life,
A breath of Godhead greaten human time.
Although she leaned down to their littleness
Covering their lives with her strong passionate hands
And knew by sympathy their needs and wants
And dived in the shallow wave-depths of their lives
And met and shared their heart-beats of grief and joy
And bent to heal their sorrow and their pride,
Lavishing the might that was hers on her lone peak
To lift to it their aspiration's cry,
And though she drew their souls into her vast
And surrounded with the silence of her deeps
And held as the great Mother holds her own,
Only her earthly surface bore their charge
And mixed its fire with their mortality:
Her greater self lived sole, unclaimed, within.
Oftener in dumb Nature's stir and peace
A nearness she could feel serenely one;
The Force in her drew earth's subhuman broods;
And to her spirit's large and free delight
She joined the ardent-hued magnificent lives
Of animal and bird and flower and tree.
They answered to her with the simple heart.
In man a dim disturbing somewhat lives;
It knows but turns away from divine Light
Preferring the dark ignorance of the fall.
Among the many who came drawn to her
Nowhere she found her partner of high tasks,
The comrade of her soul, her other self
Who was made with her, like God and Nature, one.

‘TOO GREAT WAS HER DEMAND, TOO PURE HER FORCE’

Some near approached, were touched, caught fire, then failed,
Too great was her demand, too pure her force.
Thus lighting earth around her like a sun,
Yet in her inmost sky an orb aloof,
A distance severed her from those most close.
Puissant, apart her soul as the gods live.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 34, pp. 365-66)



‘THE KEY TO THE WORLD OF KNOWLEDGE-IGNORANCE’

Our mistake is that in trying to define the indefinable we think we have succeeded when we have described by an all-exclusive negation this Absolute which we are yet compelled to conceive of as a supreme positive and the cause of all positives. It is not surprising that so many acute thinkers, with their eye on the facts of being and not on verbal distinctions, should be driven to infer that the Absolute is a fiction of the intelligence, an idea born of words and verbal dialectics, a zero, non-existent, and to conclude that an eternal Becoming is the only truth of our existence. The ancient sages spoke indeed of Brahman negatively, — they said of it, *neti neti*, it is not this, it is not that, — but they took care also to speak of it positively; they said of it too, it is this, it is that, it is all: for they saw that to limit it either by positive or negative definitions was to fall away from its truth. Brahman, they said, is Matter, is Life, is Mind, is Supermind, is cosmic Delight, is Sachchidananda; yet it cannot really be defined by any of these things, not even by our largest conception of Sachchidananda. In the world as we see it, for our mental consciousness however high we carry it, we find that to every positive there is a negative. But the negative is not a zero, — indeed whatever appears to us a zero is packed with force, teeming with power of existence, full of actual or potential contents. Neither does the existence of the negative make its corresponding positive non-existent or an unreality; it only makes the positive an incomplete statement of the truth of things and even, we may say, of the positive’s own truth. For the positive and the negative exist not only side by side, but in relation to each other and by each other; they complete and would to the all-view, which a limited mind cannot reach, explain one another. Each by itself is not really known; we only begin to know it in its deeper truth when we can read into it the suggestions of its apparent opposite. It is through such a profounder catholic intuition and not by exclusive logical oppositions that our intelligence ought to approach the Absolute.

The positives of the Absolute are its various statements of itself to our consciousness; its negatives bring in the rest of its absolute positivity by which its limitation to these first statements is denied. We have, to begin with, its large primary relations such as the infinite and the finite, the conditioned and unconditioned, the qualified and unqualified; in each pair the negative conceals the whole power of the corresponding positive which is contained in it and emerges from it: there is no real opposition. We have, in a less subtle order of truths, the transcendent and the cosmic, the universal and the individual; here we have seen that each member of these pairs is contained in its apparent opposite. The universal particularises itself in the individual; the individual contains in himself all the generalities of the universal. The universal consciousness finds all itself by the variations of numberless

individuals, not by suppressing variations; the individual consciousness fulfils all itself when it is universalised into sympathy and identity with the cosmic, not by limiting itself in the ego. So too the cosmic contains in all itself and in each thing in it the complete immanence of the transcendent; it maintains itself as the world-being by the consciousness of its own transcendent reality, it finds itself in each individual being by the realisation of the divine and transcendent in that being and in all existences. The transcendent contains, manifests, constitutes the cosmos and by manifesting it manifests or discovers, as we may say in the old poetic sense of that word, its own infinite harmonic varieties. But even in the lower orders of the relative we find this play of negative and positive, and through the divine reconciliation of its terms, not by excising them or carrying their opposition to the bitter end, we have to arrive at the Absolute. For there in the Absolute all this relativity, all this varying rhythmic self-statement of the Absolute, finds, not its complete denial, but its reason for existence and its justification, not its conviction as a lie, but the source and principle of its truth. Cosmos and individual go back to something in the Absolute which is the true truth of individuality, the true truth of cosmic being and not their denial and conviction of their falsity. The Absolute is not a sceptical logician denying the truth of all his own statements and self-expressions, but an existence so utterly and so infinitely positive that no finite positive can be formulated which can exhaust it or bind it down to its definitions.

It is evident that if such is the truth of the Absolute, we cannot bind it either by our law of contradictions. That law is necessary to us in order that we may posit partial and practical truths, think out things clearly, decisively and usefully, classify, act, deal with them effectively for particular purposes in our divisions of Space, distinctions of form and property, moments of Time. It represents a formal and strongly dynamic truth of existence in its practical workings which is strongest in the most outward term of things, the material, but becomes less and less rigidly binding as we go upward in the scale, mount on the more subtle rungs of the ladder of being. It is especially necessary for us in dealing with material phenomena and forces; we have to suppose them to be one thing at a time, to have one power at a time and to be limited by their ostensible and practically effective capacities and properties; otherwise we cannot deal with them. But even there, as human thought is beginning to realise, the distinctions made by the intellect and the classifications and practical experiments of Science, while perfectly valid in their own field and for their own purpose, do not represent the whole or the real truth of things, whether of things in the whole or of the thing by itself which we have classified and set artificially apart, isolated for separate analysis. By that isolation we are indeed able to deal with it very practically, very effectively, and we think at first that the effectiveness of our action proves the entire and sufficient truth of our isolating and analysing knowledge. Afterwards we find that by getting beyond it we can arrive at a greater truth and a greater effectivity.

The isolation is certainly necessary for first knowledge. A diamond is a diamond and a pearl a pearl, each thing of its own class, existing by its distinction from all others, each distinguished by its own form and properties. But each has also properties and elements which are common to both and others which are common to material things in general. And in reality each does not exist only by its distinctions, but much more essentially by that which is common to both; and we get back to the very basis and enduring truth of all material things only when we find that all are the same thing, one energy, one substance or, if you like, one universal motion which throws up, brings out, combines, realises these different forms, these various properties, these fixed and harmonised potentialities of its own being. If we stop short at the knowledge of distinctions, we can deal only with diamond and pearl as they are, fix their values, uses, varieties, make the best ordinary use and profit of them; but if we can get to the knowledge and control of their elements and the common properties of the class to which they belong, we may arrive at the power of making either a diamond or pearl at our pleasure: go farther still and master that which all material things are in their essence and we may arrive even at the power of transmutation which would give the greatest possible control of material Nature. Thus the knowledge of distinctions arrives at its greatest truth and effective use when we arrive at the deeper knowledge of that which reconciles distinctions in the unity behind all variations. That deeper knowledge does not deprive the other and more superficial of effectivity nor convict it of vanity. We cannot conclude from our ultimate material discovery that there is no original substance or Matter, only energy manifesting substance or manifesting as substance, — that diamond and pearl are non-existent, unreal, only true to the illusion of our senses of perception and action, that the one substance, energy or motion is the sole eternal truth and that therefore the best or only rational use of our science would be to dissolve diamond and pearl and everything else that we can dissolve into this one eternal and original reality and get done with their forms and properties for ever. There is an essentiality of things, a commonalty of things, an individuality of things; the commonalty and individuality are true and eternal powers of the essentiality: that transcends them both, but the three together and not one by itself are the eternal terms of existence.

This truth which we can see, though with difficulty and under considerable restrictions, even in the material world where the subtler and higher powers of being have to be excluded from our intellectual operations, becomes clearer and more powerful when we ascend in the scale. We see the truth of our classifications and distinctions, but also their limits. All things, even while different, are yet one. For practical purposes plant, animal, man are different existences; yet when we look deeper we see that the plant is only an animal with an insufficient evolution of self-consciousness and dynamic force; the animal is man in the making; man himself is that animal and yet the something more of self-consciousness and dynamic power of consciousness that make him man; and yet again he is the something more which is

contained and repressed in his being as the potentiality of the divine, — he is a god in the making. In each of these, plant, animal, man, god, the Eternal is there containing and repressing himself as it were in order to make a certain statement of his being. Each is the whole Eternal concealed. Man himself, who takes up all that went before him and transmutes it into the term of manhood, is the individual human being and yet he is all mankind, the universal man acting in the individual as a human personality. He is all and yet he is himself and unique. He is what he is, but he is also the past of all that he was and the potentiality of all that he is not. We cannot understand him if we look only at his present individuality, but we cannot understand him either if we look only at his commonalty, his general term of manhood, or go back by exclusion from both to an essentiality of his being in which his distinguishing manhood and his particularising individuality seem to disappear. Each thing is the Absolute, all are that One, but in these three terms always the Absolute makes its statement of its developed self-existence. We are not, because of the essential unity, compelled to say that all God's various action and workings are vain, worthless, unreal, phenomenal, illusory, and that the best and only rational or super-rational use we can make of our knowledge is to get away from them, dissolve our cosmic and individual existence into the essential being and get rid of all becoming as a futility for ever.

In our practical dealings with life we have to arrive at the same truth. For certain practical ends we have to say that a thing is good or bad, beautiful or ugly, just or unjust and act upon that statement; but if we limit ourselves by it, we do not get at real knowledge. The law of contradictions here is only valid in so far as two different and opposite statements cannot be true of the same thing at the same time, in the same field, in the same respect, from the same point of view and for the same practical purpose. A great war, destruction or violent all-upheaving revolution, for example, may present itself to us as an evil, a virulent and catastrophic disorder, and it is so in certain respects, results, ways of looking at it; but from others, it may be a great good, since it rapidly clears the field for a new good or a more satisfying order. No man is simply good or simply bad; every man is a mixture of contraries: even we find these contraries often inextricably mixed up in a single feeling, a single action. All kinds of conflicting qualities, powers, values meet together and run into each other to make up our action, life, nature. We can only understand entirely if we get to some sense of the Absolute and yet look at its workings in all the relativities which are being manifested, — look not only at each by itself, but each in relation to all and to that which exceeds and reconciles them all. In fact we can only know by getting to the divine view and purpose in things and not merely looking at our own, though our own limited human view and momentary purpose have their validity in the cadre of the All. For behind all relativities there is this Absolute which gives them their being and their justification. No particular act or arrangement in the world is by itself absolute justice; but there is behind all acts and arrangements something absolute which we call justice, which expresses itself through their relativities and which we

would realise if our view and knowledge were comprehensive instead of being as they are partial, superficial, limited to a few ostensible facts and appearances. So too there is an absolute good and an absolute beauty: but we can only get a glimpse of it if we embrace all things impartially and get beyond their appearances to some sense of that which, between them, all and each are by their complex terms trying to state and work out; not an indeterminate, — for the indeterminate, being only the original stuff or perhaps the packed condition of determinations, would explain by itself nothing at all, — but the Absolute. We can indeed follow the opposite method of breaking up all things and refusing to look at them as a whole and in relation to that which justifies them and so create an intellectual conception of absolute evil, absolute injustice, the absolute hideousness, painfulness, triviality, vulgarity or vanity of all things; but that is to pursue to its extreme the method of the Ignorance whose view is based upon division. We cannot rightly so deal with the divine workings. Because the Absolute expresses itself through relativities the secret of which we find it difficult to fathom, because to our limited view everything appears to be a purposeless play of oppositions and negatives or a mass of contradictions, we cannot conclude that our first limited view is right or that all is a vain delusion of the mind and has no reality. Nor can we solve all by an original unreconciled contradiction which is to explain all the rest. The human reason is wrong in attaching a separate and definitive value to each contradiction by itself or getting rid of one by altogether denying the other; but it is right in refusing to accept as final and as the last word the coupling of contradictions which have in no way been reconciled together or have not found their source and significance in something beyond their opposition.

We cannot, either, effect a reconciliation or explanation of the original contradictions of existence by taking refuge in our concept of Time. Time, as we know or conceive it, is only our means of realising things in succession, it is a condition and cause of conditions, varies on different planes of existence, varies even for beings on one and the same plane: that is to say, it is not an Absolute and cannot explain the primary relations of the Absolute. They work themselves out in detail by Time and seem to our mental and vital being to be determined by it; but that seeming does not carry us back to their sources and principles. We make the distinction of conditioned and unconditioned and we imagine that the unconditioned became conditioned, the Infinite became finite at some date in Time, and may cease to be finite at some other date in Time, because it so appears to us in details, particulars or with regard to this or that system of things. But if we look at existence as a whole, we see that infinite and finite coexist and exist in and by each other. Even if our universe were to disappear and reappear rhythmically in Time, as was the old belief, that too would be only a large detail and would not show that at a particular time all condition ceases in the whole range of infinite existence and all Being becomes the unconditioned, at another it again takes on the reality or the appearance of conditions. The first source and the primary relations lie beyond our mental divisions of Time, in the divine

timelessness or else in the indivisible or eternal Time of which our divisions and successions are only figures in a mental experience.

There we see that all meets and all principles, all persistent realities of existence, — for the finite as a principle of being is as persistent as the infinite, — stand in a primary relation to each other in a free, not an exclusive unity of the Absolute, and that the way they present themselves to us in a material or a mental world is only a working out of them in secondary, tertiary or yet lower relativities. The Absolute has not become the contrary of itself and assumed at a certain date real or unreal relativities of which it was originally incapable, nor has the One become by a miracle the Many, nor the unconditioned deviated into the conditioned, nor the unqualified sprouted out into qualities. These oppositions are only the conveniences of our mental consciousness, our divisions of the indivisible. The things they represent are not fictions, they are realities, but they are not rightly known if they are set in irreconcilable opposition to or separation from each other; for there is no such irreconcilable opposition or separation of them in the all-view of the Absolute. This is the weakness not only of our scientific divisions and metaphysical distinctions, but of our exclusive spiritual realisations which are only exclusive because to arrive at them we have to start from our limiting and dividing mental consciousness. We have to make the metaphysical distinctions in order to help our intelligence towards a truth which exceeds it, because it is only so that it can escape from the confusions of our first undistinguishing mental view of things; but if we bind ourselves by them to the end, we make chains of what should only have been first helps. We have to make use too of distinct spiritual realisations which may at first seem contrary to each other, because as mental beings it is difficult or impossible for us to seize at once largely and completely what is beyond our mentality; but we err if we intellectualise them into sole truths, — as when we assert that the Impersonal must be the one ultimate realisation and the rest creation of Maya or declare the Saguna, the Divine in its qualities, to be that and thrust away the impersonality from our spiritual experience. We have to see that both these realisations of the great spiritual seekers are equally valid in themselves, equally invalid against each other; they are one and the same Reality experienced on two sides which are both necessary for the full knowledge and experience of each other and of that which they both are. So is it with the One and the Many, the finite and the infinite, the transcendent and the cosmic, the individual and the universal; each is the other as well as itself and neither can be entirely known without the other and without exceeding their appearance of contrary oppositions.

We see then that there are three terms of the one existence, transcendent, universal and individual, and that each of these always contains secretly or overtly the two others. The Transcendent possesses itself always and controls the other two as the basis of its own temporal possibilities; that is the Divine, the eternal all-possessing God-consciousness, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, which informs, embraces, governs all existences. The human being is here on earth the

highest power of the third term, the individual, for he alone can work out at its critical turning-point that movement of self-manifestation which appears to us as the involution and evolution of the divine consciousness between the two terms of the Ignorance and the Knowledge. The power of the individual to possess in his consciousness by self-knowledge his unity with the Transcendent and the universal, with the One Being and all beings and to live in that knowledge and transform his life by it, is that which makes the working out of the divine self-manifestation through the individual possible; and the arrival of the individual — not in one but in all — at the divine life is the sole conceivable object of the movement. The existence of the individual is not an error in some self of the Absolute which that self afterwards discovers; for it is impossible that the absolute self-awareness or anything that is one with it should be ignorant of its own truth and its own capacities and betrayed by that ignorance either into a false idea of itself which it has to correct or an impracticable venture which it has to renounce. Neither is the individual existence a subordinate circumstance in a divine play or Lila, a play which consists in a continual revolution through unending cycles of pleasure and suffering without any higher hope in the Lila itself or any issue from it except the occasional escape of a few from time to time out of their bondage to this ignorance. We might be compelled to hold that ruthless and disastrous view of God’s workings if man had no power of self-transcendence or no power of transforming by self-knowledge the conditions of the play nearer and nearer to the truth of the divine Delight. In that power lies the justification of individual existence; the individual and the universal unfolding in themselves the divine light, power, joy of transcendent Sachchidananda always manifest above them, always secret behind their surface appearances, this is the hidden intention, the ultimate significance of the divine play, the Lila. But it is in themselves, in their transformation but also their persistence and perfect relations, not in their self-annihilation that that must be unfolded. Otherwise there would be no reason for their ever having existed; the possibility of the Divine’s unfolding in the individual is the secret of the enigma; his presence there and this intention of self-unfolding are the key to the world of Knowledge-Ignorance.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, pp. 393-402)

THE UNIVERSAL CONSCIOUSNESS¹

The Question of the Month:

I have encountered in my life several examples of people living or trying to live in the universal consciousness and it seemed to me that it rendered them less compassionate, less humane, less tender to the sufferings of others. It seems to me that if it is necessary not to remain in the individual consciousness when it is a question of our own sufferings, it is otherwise when it is a question of sympathising with the sufferings of others. In my opinion we feel more keenly the troubles of our brothers in humanity if we remain in the individual consciousness. But I may be mistaken and ask only to be enlightened by you on this point.

Is it certain that such people are living in the universal consciousness? or, if they are, is it certain that they are really less humane and compassionate? May they not be exercising their humanity in another fashion than the obvious and external signs of sympathy and tenderness?

If a man is really insensible to the experiences of others in the world, he is not living in the full universal consciousness. Either he has shut himself up in an experience of an individual peace and self-content, or he is absorbed by his contact with some universal principle in its abstract form without regard to its universal action, or he is living inwardly apart from the universe in touch with something transcendent of world-experience. All these states are useful to the soul in its progress, but they are not the universal consciousness.

When a man lives in the cosmic self, he necessarily embraces the life of the world and his attitude towards that world struggling upward from the egoistic state must be one of compassion, of love or of helpfulness. The Buddhists held that immersion in the infinite non-ego was in itself an immersion in a sea of infinite compassion. The liberated Sannyasin is described in the Gita and in other Hindu books as one whose occupation is beneficence to all creatures. But this vast spirit of beneficence does not necessarily exercise itself by the outward forms of emotional sympathy or active charity. We must not bind down all natures or all states of the divine consciousness in man to the one form of helpfulness which seems to us the most attractive, the most beautiful or the most beneficent. There is a higher sympathy than that of the easily touched emotions, a greater beneficence than that of an obvious utility to particular individuals in their particular sufferings.

1. Published in the *Arya* in January 1915. In the *Arya* the following sentence preceded the question: "One of our subscribers in Europe puts to us the following difficulty: —" (*Editorial Note on the Text in CWSA*)

The egoistic consciousness passes through many stages in its emotional expansion. At first it is bound within itself, callous therefore to the experiences of others. Afterwards it is sympathetic only with those who are identified in some measure with itself, indifferent to the indifferent, malignant to the hostile. When it overcomes this respect for persons, it is ready for the reception of the altruistic principle.

But even charity and altruism are often essentially egoistic in their immediate motive. They are stirred by the discomfort of the sight of suffering to the nervous system or by the pleasurable of others' appreciation of our kindliness or by the egoistic self-appreciation of our own benevolence or by the need of indulgence in sympathy. There are philanthropists who would be troubled if the poor were not always with us, for they would then have no field for their charity.

We begin to enter into the universal consciousness when, apart from all individual motive and necessity, by the mere fact of unity of our being with all others, their joy becomes our joy, their suffering our suffering. But we must not mistake this for the highest condition. After a time we are no longer overcome by any suffering, our own or others', but are merely touched and respond in helpfulness. And there is yet another state in which the subjection to suffering is impossible to us because we live in the Beatitude, but this does not deter us from love and beneficence, — any more than it is necessary for a mother to weep or be overcome by the little childish griefs and troubles of her children in order to love, understand and soothe.

Nor is detailed sympathy and alleviation of particular sufferings the only help that can be given to men. To cut down branches of a man's tree of suffering is good, but they grow again; to aid him to remove its roots is a still more divine helpfulness. The gift of joy, peace or perfection is a greater giving than the effusion of an individual benevolence and sympathy and it is the most royal outcome of unity with others in the universal consciousness.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 453-55)



THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

Our contemporary, the *Statesman*, notices in an unusually self-restrained article the recent brochure re-published by Dr. A. K. Coomaraswamy from the *Modern Review* under the title, "The Message of the East". We have not the work before us but, from our memory of the articles and our knowledge of our distinguished countryman's views, we do not think the *Statesman* has quite caught the spirit of the writer. Dr. Coomaraswamy is above all a lover of art and beauty and the ancient thought and greatness of India, but he is also, and as a result of this deep love and appreciation, an ardent Nationalist. Writing as an artist, he calls attention to the debased aesthetic ideas and tastes which the ugly and sordid commercialism of the West has introduced into the mind of a nation once distinguished for its superior beauty and grandeur of conception and for the extent to which it suffused the whole of life with the forces of the intellect and the spirit. He laments the persistence of a servile imitation of English ideas, English methods, English machinery and production even in the new Nationalism. And he reminds his readers that nations cannot be made by politics and economics alone, but that art also has a great and still unrecognised claim. The main drift of his writing is to censure the low imitative un-Indian and bourgeois ideals of our national activity in the nineteenth century and to recall our minds to the cardinal fact that, if India is to arise and be great as a nation, it is not by imitating the methods and institutions of English politics and commerce, but by carrying her own civilisation, purified of the weaknesses that have overtaken it, to a much higher and mightier fulfilment than any that it has reached in the past. Our mission is to outdistance, lead and instruct Europe, not merely to imitate and learn from her. Dr. Coomaraswamy speaks of art, but it is certain that a man of his wide culture would not exclude, and we know he does not exclude, thought, literature and religion from the forces that must uplift our nation and are necessary to its future. To recover Indian thought, Indian character, Indian perceptions, Indian energy, Indian greatness, and to solve the problems that perplex the world in an Indian spirit and from the Indian standpoint, this, in our view, is the mission of Nationalism. We agree with Dr. Coomaraswamy that an exclusive preoccupation with politics and economics is likely to dwarf our growth and prevent the flowering of originality and energy. We have to return to the fountainheads of our ancient religion, philosophy, art and literature and pour the revivifying influences of our immemorial Aryan spirit and ideals into our political and economic development. This is the ideal the *Karmayogin* holds before it, and our outlook and Dr. Coomaraswamy's do not substantially differ. But in judging our present activities we cannot look, as he does, from a purely artistic and idealistic standpoint, but must act and write in the spirit of a practical idealism.

The debasement of our mind, character and tastes by a grossly commercial, materialistic and insufficient European education is a fact on which the young Nationalism has always insisted. The practical destruction of our artistic perceptions

and the plastic skill and fineness of eye and hand which once gave our productions pre-eminence, distinction and mastery of the European markets, is also a thing accomplished. Most vital of all, the spiritual and intellectual divorce from the past which the present schools and universities have effected, has beggared the nation of the originality, high aspiration and forceful energy which can alone make a nation free and great. To reverse the process and recover what we have lost, is undoubtedly the first object to which we ought to devote ourselves. And as the loss of originality, aspiration and energy was the most vital of all these losses, so their recovery should be our first and most important objective. The primary aim of the prophets of Nationalism was to rid the nation of the idea that the future was limited by the circumstances of the present, that because temporary causes had brought us low and made us weak, low therefore must be our aims and weak our methods. They pointed the mind of the people to a great and splendid destiny, not in some distant millennium but in the comparatively near future, and fired the hearts of the young men with a burning desire to realise the apocalyptic vision. As a justification of what might otherwise have seemed a dream and as an inexhaustible source of energy and inspiration, they pointed persistently to the great achievements and grandiose civilisation of our forefathers and called on the rising generation to recover their lost spiritual and intellectual heritage. It cannot be denied that this double effort to realise the past and the future has been the distinguishing temperament and the chief uplifting force in the movement, and it cannot be denied that it is bringing back to our young men originality, aspiration and energy. By this force the character, temper and action of the Bengali has been altered beyond recognition in a few years. To raise the mind, character and tastes of the people, to recover the ancient nobility of temper, the strong Aryan character and the high Aryan outlook, the perceptions which made earthly life beautiful and wonderful, and the magnificent spiritual experiences, realisations and aspirations which made us the deepest-hearted, deepest-thoughted and most delicately profound in life of all the peoples of the earth, is the task next in importance and urgency. We had hoped by means of National Education to effect this great object as well as to restore to our youth the intellectual heritage of the nation and build up on that basis a yet greater culture in the future. We must admit that the instrument which we cherished and for which such sacrifices were made, has proved insufficient and threatens, in unfit hands, to lose its promise of fulfilment and be diverted to lower ends. But the movement is greater than its instruments. We must strive to prevent the destruction of that which we have created and, in the meanwhile, build up a centre of culture, freer and more perfect, which will either permeate the other with itself or replace it if destroyed. Finally, the artistic awakening has been commenced by that young, living and energetic school which has gathered round the Master and originator, S. J. Abanindranath Tagore. The impulse which this school is giving, its inspired artistic recovery of the past, its intuitive anticipations of the future, have to be popularised and made a national possession.

Dr. Coomaraswamy complains of the survivals of the past in the preparations for the future. But no movement, however vigorous, can throw off in a few years the effects of a whole century. We must remember also why the degradation and de-nationalisation, “the mighty evil in our souls” of which the writer complains, came into being. A painful but necessary work had to be done, and because the English nation were the fittest instrument for His purpose, God led them all over those thousands of miles of alien Ocean, gave strength to their hearts and subtlety to their brains, and set them up in India to do His work, which they have been doing faithfully, if blindly, ever since and are doing at the present moment. The spirit and ideals of India had come to be confined in a mould which, however beautiful, was too narrow and slender to bear the mighty burden of our future. When that happens, the mould has to be broken and even the ideal lost for a while, in order to be recovered free of constraint and limitation. We have to recover the Aryan spirit and ideal and keep it intact but enshrined in new forms and more expansive institutions. We have to treasure jealously everything in our social structure, manners, institutions, which is of permanent value, essential to our spirit or helpful to the future; but we must not cabin the expanding and aggressive spirit of India in temporary forms which are the creation of the last few hundred years. That would be a vain and disastrous endeavour. The mould is broken; we must remould in larger outlines and with a richer content. For the work of destruction England was best fitted by her stubborn individuality and by that very commercialism and materialism which made her the antitype in temper and culture of the race she governed. She was chosen too for the unrivalled efficiency and skill with which she has organised an individualistic and materialistic democracy. We had to come to close quarters with that democratic organisation, draw it into ourselves and absorb the democratic spirit and methods so that we might rise beyond them. Our half-aristocratic half-theocratic feudalism had to be broken, in order that the democratic spirit of the Vedanta might be released and, by absorbing all that is needed of the aristocratic and theocratic culture, create for the Indian race a new and powerful political and social organisation. We have to learn and use the democratic principle and methods of Europe, in order that hereafter we may build up something more suited to our past and to the future of humanity. We have to throw away the individualism and materialism and keep the democracy. We have to solve for the human race the problem of harmonising and spiritualising its impulses towards liberty, equality and fraternity. In order that we may fulfil our mission we must be masters in our own home. It is out of no hostility to the English people, no race hatred that we seek absolute autonomy, but because it is the first condition of our developing our national self and realising our destiny. It is for this reason that the engrossing political preoccupation came upon us; and we cannot give up or tone down our political movement until the lesson of democratic self-government is learned and the first condition of national self-fulfilment realised. For another reason also England was chosen, because she had organised the competitive

system of commerce, with its bitter and murderous struggle for existence, in the most skilful, discreet and successful fashion. We had to feel the full weight of that system and learn the literal meaning of this industrial realisation of Darwinism. It has been written large for us in ghastly letters of famine, chronic starvation and misery and a decreasing population. We have risen at last, entered into the battle and with the Boycott for a weapon, are striking at the throat of British commerce even as it struck at ours, first by protection and then by free trade. Again it is not out of hatred that we strike, but out of self-preservation. We must conquer in that battle if we are to live. We cannot arrest our development of industry and commerce while waiting for a new commercial system to develop or for beauty and art to reconquer the world. As in politics so in commerce, we must learn and master the European methods in order that we may eventually rise above them. The crude commercial Swadeshi, which Dr. Coomaraswamy finds so distasteful and disappointing, is as integral a part of the national awakening as the movement towards Swaraj or as the new School of Art. If this crude Swadeshi were to collapse and the national movement towards autonomy come to nothing, the artistic renaissance he has praised so highly, would wither and sink with the drying up of the soil in which it was planted. A nation need not be luxuriously wealthy in order to be profoundly artistic, but it must have a certain amount of well-being, a national culture and, above all, hope and ardour, if it is to maintain a national art based on a widespread development of artistic perception and faculty. Moreover, aesthetic arts and crafts cannot live against the onrush of cheap and vulgar manufactures under the conditions of the modern social structure. Industry can only become again beautiful if poverty and the struggle for life are eliminated from society and the co-operative State and commune organised as the fruit of a great moral and spiritual uplifting of humanity. We hold such an uplifting and re-organisation as part of India's mission. But to do her work she must live. Therefore the economical preoccupation has been added to the political. We perceive the salvation of the country not in parting with either of these, but in adding to them a religious and moral preoccupation. On the basis of that religious and moral awakening the preoccupation of art and fine culture will be added and firmly based. There are many who perceive the necessity of the religious and moral regeneration, who are inclined to turn from the prosaic details of politics and commerce and regret that any guide and teacher of the nation should stoop to mingle in them. That is a grievous error. The men who would lead India must be catholic and many-sided. When the Avatar comes, we like to believe that he will be not only the religious guide, but the political leader, the great educationist, the regenerator of society, the captain of co-operative industry, with the soul of the poet, scholar and artist. He will be in short the summary and grand type of the future Indian nation which is rising to reshape and lead the world.

Karmayogin, 25 September 1909

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Karmayogin*, CWSA, Vol. 8, pp. 244-49)

REASON AND SOCIETY¹

A pragmatic mentalism would not be in its essential principle other than the attempt already made by the race to make the intellectual Reason the governor of life, but this has been done hitherto by a reason preoccupied with the external fact and subjected to it; mind has attempted to read the law of life and its possibilities and organise life anew within those limits by invention, device, regulation, mechanisms of many kinds, or it has attempted to govern life by mental ideals of an abstract order, such as democracy or socialism, and devise an appropriate machinery materialising that mental abstraction so as to make the dominance of the idea practical and viable. A subjectivist pragmatic mentalism would try to act more subtly and plastically on life; it would seek for “truth of being”, some idea or ideal of its perfection or practice or efficiency, right way of being or living, and attempt to let that grow in the individual and govern his nature, grow in the collective life and govern its formations. Or it would place the development and organisation of the mental life of man as the primary consideration and life and society as a convenience for this true aim of human existence. A new civilisation no longer vitalistic or mainly political and economic, but intellectual, cultural, idealistic, taking up the ancient ideal of man, the perfected mental being in an ennobled life and sound body, a great expansion of human mind and intellect, a mankind more mentally alive, even a human race grown capable of culture and not only of a greater external civilisation, thus fulfilling on a large human and universal scale the tendencies which in the past appeared only in a few favoured countries and epochs and even then imperfectly and mostly in a cultured class, might be the consequence of this change. That prospect has its attractions, and for the humanist and the intellectual it is in one form or another their utopia of the future. But this would not really carry the human evolution farther; it would only give it for a time a larger, finer and freer movement in its widest attainable circle. If the mentality remained too pragmatic, too eager to rationalise or organise life according to the idea, the peril of mechanisation and standardisation would be there. If the mental ideas governing the individual and social life took a settled form, became a cultural system of the mind, this system would after a time exhaust its possibilities and human life would settle down into a groove, satisfied and non-evolutionary, as happened in the Graeco-Roman world or in China or elsewhere where the mental intellect became the predominant power of life. If this arrest were avoided either by the multiplication of different cultures — different peoples acting upon each other but escaping the tendency to replication and standardisation which is the tendency

1. Late 1930s or 1940s. Editorial title. The piece seems to be related to *The Human Cycle*. — *Editorial Note on Text in CWSA*.

of the human collective mind or by a free progressiveness of the human intelligence making constantly new ideas, new ideals, still the movement would eventually be in a circle or an ellipsis which could be a constant description of a new-old movement in the same field. In fact our external mind moving on the surface tends always to exhaust itself rapidly; if it expends itself slowly, conservatively, at a leisurely pace, it can create a civilisation and culture which will last for centuries or even for one or more thousands of years; but that too will exhaust itself in time; if it throws itself into a brilliant or rapid movement as in ancient Greece or in modern Europe a few centuries are likely to see the end of this flaming up as of a new star. Afterwards there must be stagnation, decline and a renewal of the mental circle.

This is because mind and thought are not the sovereign principle or highest term of our existence; mind and thought therefore can to a certain extent fulfil themselves, but they cannot fulfil life nor can they give to man his complete self. Mind is an instrument, not the self of man; nor the complete reality or highest reality of his being. It is a mediator between the being and life; it seeks to know truth of being and truth of life and bring them together. Truth of idea therefore is effective only so far as it can interpret truth of spirit and truth of life, it has itself no essential existence; when it erects itself as a mental abstraction, it has no reality and no effective power; it is only an index, a figure. It can become effective only by taking up life and catching hold of some vital force to effectuate it, but usually it ends by [. . .], exhausting or stereotyping and sterilising the force it uses; or it can become effective only when it canalises and brings out into action of mind and life an inner truth of being, a truth of spirit and it is then powerful only so long as it replenishes itself from its spiritual source and so keeps itself true and alive.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 415-17)



**‘ACCEPT THE OFFERING OF ALL MYSELF
AS A HOLOCAUST THAT
THY WORK MAY BE ACCOMPLISHED’**

August 5, 1914

O Eternal Master, Thou art in all things like a vivifying breath, a sweet peace, a sun of luminous love piercing the clouds of darkness.

Grant that we may be Thy vivifying breath, Thy sweet peace, Thy luminous love upon the earth amidst our ignorant and sorrowful human brothers.

O divine Master, accept the offering of all myself as a holocaust that Thy work may be accomplished and the time may not pass by in vain.

In a serene ecstasy I give myself to Thee, that Thou mayst once again become the Master of what is Thine, the possessor of Thyself in each one of the countless atoms and in the consciousness that is synthetic and one.

O divine Master, accept this offering, this complete holocaust that the time may not have come in vain.

My whole being is transformed into a living flame, a flame of sacrifice of pure love.

Become once again the king of Thy kingdom, deliver the earth from the heavy weight which is crushing it, the weight of its own inert, ignorant, and obscure ill will.

O my sweet Master, my being is ablaze with the ardent flame of the sacrifice of love: accept my offering that the obstacle may be overcome.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 217)



HOMAGE¹

On February 21, the fifth birthday of *Mother India* we pay homage to one whose birthday was chosen by us as the most significant and auspicious occasion on which to launch a journal like ours.

We pay homage to the companion and co-worker of Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, who guides the Ashram in which he sought to create the nucleus of an unprecedented spiritual Consciousness and whose adventurous future he put from the beginning in her fostering and heroic hands.

We pay homage to her because in a world sunk in small selfishnesses and divisions she stands for the hidden Infinite in whose oneness all oppositions, all barriers cease. And because in a world absorbed in petty temporalities, interests of the moment, attachments of the hour, she calls us to the secret Eternal who liberates the soul in us into a peace and a plenitude beyond mortal fret and human hankering.

But our homage goes to her not only for the boon she can grant of the Infinite and the Eternal to our bounded beings. It goes to her also because she does not forget in the Infinite the finite and in the Eternal the temporal. On each small field of activity, on every brief labour she lays the Truth-touch by which they may become peep-holes of infinitude, flashes of eternity.

She awakens us to a packed profound significance in all things, which has to be unfolded, day after day, and rendered radiant in even their exteriors. For the call of Sri Aurobindo is not merely towards the Infinite and the Eternal: it is also towards the Divine, the supreme Creative Consciousness and Will that from the secrecies of the illimitable and the absolute evokes this universe of innumerable forms, this cosmic network of multitudinous relations. The Mother holds before us the archetypes, the perfect patterns of the finite and the temporal, which reside in the Divine's all-conceiving all-evolving all-manifesting depths. She is the minister of the revelation of what Sri Aurobindo terms the Supermind.

With that ministry she comes intimately close to us, clasps us to her heart as her own children who have gone astray, allows her greatness to be clasped by us as our own mother who can carry us back to the bliss we have forsaken. Thus her sublimity is all sweetness to our mortal nature, and her sweetness is to that nature a source of sublimity.

Whatever India has dreamt of and hoped for in her finest periods — the reign of the Divine upon earth — the Mother strives to realise. The whole sense of Indian culture — the expression of the Highest Truth in every branch of human endeavour — is like a flame in her, seeking out the soul locked in each clay-figure. Poets of God's

1. Reprinted from *Mother India*, February 1953, pp. 5-8.

beauty, philosophers of God's wisdom, teachers of God's righteousness, helpmates of God's love, workers of God's infallibility, statesmen of God's harmony, warriors of God's immortality — all these she would fashion out of struggling and aspiring humanness. In her indeed the mystery which our nation has felt in its heart through the ages as the inspirer of its complex career and which it has named Mother India comes forth with a face we can understand and feet we can follow. Hands like our own are stretched out to us, with a power in them to lead us to a supreme destiny.

However, to be Mother India is to be not just the soul of one nation. Imaging the Divine, summoning us to the Spirit that is the ground and sovereign of the entire universe, Mother India is a universal goddess. She is India because on Indian soil this ground and sovereign has been known and loved as nowhere else and on this soil she can have most effectively her centre of radiation. But the authentic service of her is charged with a mission for all humanity.

The Mother of Sri Aurobindo's Ashram is, therefore, India most when her compassionate and creative gaze is on the whole world of erring mortals — and she is universal most when that gaze is afire with the many-sided Godward soul of India.

But when we pay homage to her on this day of her birth we salute more than the highest past kindling into a glorious present. We salute also a future that will be no mere reliving of the past, however high. For, though the spirituality that has been is of splendid value, beyond even its mighty realisations is the full orb of the Light which Sri Aurobindo wants us to make lord of our being. Through the centuries yogis and saints have hallowed the earth with their tread; yet the earth's surface alone has been touched and its core has remained in darkness. That is why mankind, for all its religions and philosophies and moral codes, is still weighted down with animality and all efforts to uplift permanently the race seem doomed to ring new changes on an old tried-out and ultimately ineffective theme. Wonderful overtures are there in this music of the Spirit, but they fall back from some ungrasped harmonic resolution. Chord after profound chord has gone forth into the unknown and yet no *grand finale* has resulted, by which the half-animal that is man may end in a human godhood. Surely, some master-rhythm has been missed. And as surely this rhythm must exist somewhere and await seizure. The discovery of it and the interfusion of it with every strain of terrestrial existence were the object of Sri Aurobindo's seventy-eight years on earth, during which his very body was becoming a new, a divine substance. And, we believe, it is for the transfiguration of earth's creatures that he gave up this godlike body in a superb sacrifice as if to gather once for all into a mystic holocaust the forces of man's mortal bondage to darkness. But Sri Aurobindo, out of the material envelope, is still a dynamic presence, still by the side of the Mother, an occult influence in his own rights and overtly operative through her for that total divinisation of the human which the world, even the spiritual world, may consider impossible but which he regards as the whole sense of evolution and implicit in the very logic of its paradoxical process. Has not that process started with blind brute

matter, unexpectedly developed sentient life in it and strangely displayed in that sentient yet unintelligent vitality a mind of manifold reason — a mind, again, not unlimited, yet ever within its limitations surprised by hungers for the Absolute and hints of the Perfect?

The soul grown blissfully one with the ultimate Spirit, the mind an instrument of direct and complete self-knowledge and world-knowledge, the life-force the medium of a luminous energy free from fatigue and failure, the body the manifestation of a supernatural substance immune to disease and decline — this fourfold ideal of Sri Aurobindo for the earth is what the Mother carries forward from year to year ever more close to realisation. A colossal work is hers, and we bow to her most gratefully for shouldering it on our behalf and for doing so with a constant smile on her face — a smile whose radiancy puts new heart into her children and, like a marvellous dawn, presages for them a divine day.

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

It is the higher reality that the Mother brings into the world — without it all else is ignorant and false.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Mother with Letters on the Mother, CWSA, Vol. 32, p. 33)

REDISCOVERING SRI AUROBINDO'S IDEA OF INDIA: LIGHTS FOR OUR TIMES

ABSTRACT:

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) was an Indian yogi, poet, nationalist leader, philosopher and spiritual master of 20th century India. Along with literary and political stalwarts like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Maharshi Dayananda, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo can be called as one of the founding fathers of the Indian Renaissance. He is credited with introducing the notion of *spiritual nationalism*¹ into the Indian freedom struggle. Educated at St. Paul's School London and King's College, Cambridge University, he returned to India in 1893 and, after a decade of service in the princely state of Baroda, joined India's struggle for independence as a rebel, revolutionary and a patriot-journalist.

In the first decade of the 20th century, Sri Aurobindo was the *first Indian leader who formulated fundamental political strategies and instruments like Swaraj (self-rule), swadeshi, the strategy of boycott and the doctrine of passive resistance*, a fact not known to many people in Indian academia! *He was the first Indian to give an open call for complete independence from the British through his paper Bande Mataram in 1907 (and later in the Karmayogin) nine years before Lokmanya Tilak gave the call of Swaraj at Belgaum (Karnataka) in April 1916!* Sri Aurobindo's contribution to Indian writing in English is unmatched and immense as he wrote profusely in genres like prose, poetry, drama, short story, literary criticism, cultural history and poetics. The vast oeuvre of his works have a multi-disciplinary appeal; he can be studied and critically researched in subjects like English, history, education, philosophy, yoga, psychology, sociology, political science and physical education. *He is the only Indian, till date, who has written an epic, mahakavya, in English.* The present paper is an attempt to discuss Sri Aurobindo's views and ideas about India, *whom he called 'a Mighty Shakti'*, her role in and relevance for the world and the best line of her development and multi-faceted growth.

The paper will also highlight his suggestions, spiritual tools and techniques for the creation of a prosperous, puissant, great, invincible and inviolable India and discuss how she can become *Vishwa Guru, a world-teacher*, not just rhetorically but in the true sense of the word.

1. Italics added by author for emphasis – here and throughout the article. — Ed.

It also focuses on the burning need of the hour to see India as one indivisible spiritual entity as *an inner development of this vision alone can save us as a people from our narrow fault-lines of caste, creed and class*. Given the increasing acrimony and distrust between classes and communities in India, rediscovering *this unifying idea of India* as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo has become *indispensable*.

Key Words: Indian Renaissance, spiritual nationalism, Indian culture, Yoga and Spirituality, Sanatana Dharma.

INTRODUCTION:

Sri Aurobindo is one of the most fragrant flowers of the Indian Renaissance, a tradition that began with the birth of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and continues even today, as the nation strives hard to find meaning and motivation for the rediscovery of her soul and spirit. His life itself is a complex puzzle, full of surprises and serendipities. Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose, Sri Aurobindo's father, was deeply anglicised and influenced by Western education and way of life and, naturally, wanted to see his children following the same intellectual and physical atmosphere and ethos. When Sri Aurobindo was just seven years old, his father entrusted him and two of his elder brothers to one of his clergymen friends in Manchester, Britain, with a very stern and strong message that *all his children should be kept strictly away from any influence of India and Indian culture!* With an advanced European education and acumen, Dr. Ghose wanted to see them highly successful and contributing in different walks of life in India. But destiny had different intentions. Over the years Sri Aurobindo developed not only a secret longing to free India but an inalienable bond to Indian culture and knowledge tradition. The bond became so deep that he did not join the British empire's service in India as collector despite clearing the prestigious I.C.S. exam in 1890 and, instead, preferred to serve the princely state of Baroda (now Vadodara). Sri Aurobindo returned to India in 1893 and headed straight to Baroda, a place where we can say he *discovered himself and the spirit of India*. It was during his long and fruitful stay in the city that he developed a strong urge to know about India and feel her people, culture and mores. He learnt Indian languages, including his mother tongue Bangla, and studied profoundly the great and glorious knowledge and tradition of ancient India, the specific qualities of Indian culture, the reasons for India's longevity as a civilisation and her spirit of national unity despite the humongous diversity in her outer life. He mulled deeply over the causes of India's dolorous subjugation under foreign empires and sought solutions for her emancipation. He did a sincere soul-search and introspection and did not hesitate to discuss the inner reasons of India's deplorable condition. In August 1893, Sri

Aurobindo contributed a series of nine articles under the name 'New Lamps for Old' to *Indu Prakash*, a paper published from Bombay by his friend K. G. Deshpande. In that series, the 21-year-old Aurobindo observed,

Our actual enemy is not any force exterior to ourselves, but own our crying weaknesses, our cowardice, our selfishness, our hypocrisy, our purblind sentimentalism.
(CWSA, Vol. 6, p. 18)

Once Sri Aurobindo recognised the causes of our plight, he put all his energies — mental, physical, economic and spiritual — to enfranchise the motherland from foreign clutches. We can say that he was one of the first to ingrain among Indians the feeling that *their land was their mother* and proclaim that India is not just a piece of earth but a mighty shakti, Bharata Shakti and we need to adore her and prove our love and loyalty to her by sacrifices. During 1905 he wrote and published a revolutionary pamphlet named *Bhawani Mandir* and around the same period he wrote a marvellous poem in Sanskrit *Bhawani Bharati*. In both works Sri Aurobindo worshipped India as Mother Bhawani, divine but shackled in the fetters of slavery, waiting for her children's chivalry. It was clearly a symbolic hint to the countrymen that only by worshipping the land as Mother can they have their political and economic liberation and a life of freedom and dignity. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, the first biographer of the Mahayogi, writes in his biography,

From the beginning Sri Aurobindo knew that it was not political freedom nor economic sufficiency but the recovery of the nation's soul that was the heart of the problem.

(*Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, p. 782)

WHAT IS INDIA?

India, the way we see her and teach our students in schools and colleges, is a geographical land mass, a collective name for mountains and fountains, rills and rocks, fields and forests. On the cultural and political front, we name India as a social and political *entity*. But the India that Sri Aurobindo talks about is a living embodiment of a Goddess, a mighty Shakti. In all his writings and speeches, we see him adoring and revering the motherland like his biological mother. In *Bhawani Mandir*, a powerful pamphlet with fire-seeds of aspiration for a free India, he defines the spiritual meaning of the nation:

. . . what is a nation? What is our mother-country? It is not a piece of earth, nor a figure of speech, nor a fiction of the mind. It is a mighty Shakti, composed of the Shaktis of all the millions of units that make up the nation, just as Bhawani

Mahisha-Mardani sprang into being from the Shaktis of all the millions of gods assembled in one mass of force and welded into unity. The Shakti we call India, Bhawani Bharati, is the living unity of the Shaktis of three hundred millions of people . . .

(CWSA, Vol. 6, p. 83)

Explicitly, what Sri Aurobindo wants to convey is that *India is a Shakti, constituted by the unity and synergy of her people*. When Indians are strong and united, India is *invincible*. Each one of us comprises a small unit of the vast national body and the land we name India. When the people are weak, selfish and disintegrated, the nation pays the price, just as hubris and myopic haughtiness got the better of our leaders in 1947 and there was a friction among people. Consequently, India paid the price in the form of partition, riots, four direct wars and a lasting religious acrimony between Hindus and Muslims. Had we remained strong and united, casting aside all narrow religious and political fault lines, India would have been a developed country today, perhaps in a better position than America. We must take our lessons and through this bitter experience of partition and disintegration, remain united in the face of the challenges and ordeals Time throws at our doorstep in the future. We must remember our past legacy, the spiritual patrimony of our ancestors and act accordingly. Throughout human history our nation has always enjoyed a privileged position of honour due to her high standards of reason, rationality, spirituality and rectitude.

In the *Bande Mataram*, Sri Aurobindo writes about the great and glorious past of India:

This great and ancient nation was once the fountain of human light, the apex of human civilisation, the exemplar of courage and humanity, the perfection of good government and settled society, the mother of all religions, the teacher of all wisdom and philosophy.

(CWSA, Vol. 7, p. 707)

The most challenging word in the above quote is '*was*'! We were '*teacher of all wisdom and philosophy*' and yet we saw decimation and, eventually, could not avoid the thousand years of foreign rule. This should be a great lesson for the present: no nation can be great, prosperous and invincible only by the mettle and marvels of the bygone age; the past at best can work as an inspiration, an experience for better and longer flights to the future. Yes, India's past has been marvellous but that itself should be a great motivation and an invitation to the present to become great and justify the tradition of excellence. Sri Aurobindo introduces India's inherent character to us with a message that we belong to a nation that was once '*fountain of human light*' and '*the apex of human civilisation*'.

In the *Karmayogin*, the paper he edited after being acquitted from the internationally famous Alipore bomb case, he writes about India:

This nation is not a new race raw from the workshop of Nature or created by modern circumstances. One of the oldest races and greatest civilisations on this earth, the most indomitable in vitality, the most fecund in greatness, the deepest in life, the most wonderful in potentiality... is now seeking to lift itself for good into an organised national unity.

(CWSA, Vol. 8, p. 23)

Many nations are new peoples, created for various socio-political, economic and religious reasons. India is immortal. We should remember that Sri Aurobindo wrote these lines in the *Karmayogin* at a time when the *great* and ubiquitous British empire was at the height of her political glory and military might. He expressed these views when Christian missionaries were busy penning highly biased books about India and Indians, and our society at large was suffering from suicidal complacency. This essay — 'The Ideal of the Karmayogin' was Sri Aurobindo's counter narrative to and rebuttal of fake narratives of British superiority and the blatant lie of the *white man's burden*.

Sri Aurobindo connected nationalism as a *religion* to the concept of India as *matribhoomi*, the motherland, a living incarnation of the Goddess. Writing about this distinction of Sri Aurobindo's idea of India and Indian nationalism, Dr. Karan Singh, a prominent politician, scholar, indologist and research scholar on Sri Aurobindo, writes in his book *Prophet of Indian Nationalism*,

His concept of the divinity of the Motherland led directly and inevitably to the demand of her complete emancipation from foreign rule, and Sri Aurobindo preached this doctrine with immense patriotic fervour. Not only did he powerfully advocate the ideal of independence, he also effectively demolished the timid and constricted political platform of the Moderates.

(p. 171)

Ripping apart the *mendicancy* of the then leaders of the Moderate faction of the Congress, Sri Aurobindo strongly differed with them on many counts and highlighted their weaknesses and causes of limited influence over the masses and the Raj. For him the foreign rulers were not just political enemies of the land but embodiments of Asura, the devil, sucking blood from the breast of the mother. How could the son enjoy sunshine when the devil is sucking blood from his mother's body? For Sri Aurobindo, India was the mother-goddess and therefore venerable and sacred. In one of his private letters to his wife Mrinalini Devi, he talks about the three madnesses of his life! One of these is,

Others look upon their country as a mass of matter, comprising a number of fields, plains, forests, mountains and rivers, and nothing more. I look upon it as my mother. I revere and adore it.

(Rishabhchand, *Sri Aurobindo, His Life Unique*, p. 41)

On January 15, 1908, Sri Aurobindo addressed a large gathering at Girgaum, Bombay on the topic of National Education. In his speech he spoke about the three bodies of the Indian nation — gross, subtle and causal. In that beautiful speech Sri Aurobindo bridges the gap between *the nationals and the nation*. For him geography is the gross body, the citizens are the subtle body and culture and spiritual character of our nation is her causal body, and *each one of us is living India, representing her at every step and in our every action*. He explains that,

We have three types of body, gross, subtle and causal. In the same way the nation has three bodies. . . . To think about our nation is first to think about our physical motherland. Stretching from the Himalayas in the north to Kanyakumari in the south, its boundaries are formed by the seas on the east and the west. . . . It is this picture, this figure that comes to us when we speak of our nation. This is the gross body of our nation. . . . Thirty-three crores [*population of India in early 20th century*] of people live on this land with their joys and sorrows, their good and bad desires: they are all part of its subtle body. Then there are aspects of the country which may undergo changes in the course of time, yet always remain in the body, in seed-state, as permanent as the atom . . . This is the causal body of the nation.

(CWSA, Vol. 7, pp. 812-13)

Our idea, attitude and worldview will change radically the day when we shall look upon and assimilate the spirit of our nation in this light. *We are the subtle body of our nation; we are the nation!* This realisation is unique and extremely soul-stirring. It will be impossible for us to speak evil of the nation, to work against her interest and to litter her lanes! Yes, this is not a chimera, it can become a reality. We can become the living bodies of our nation. A nation is most secure when it prospers in the heartbeats of her people. The key to a great and mighty nation lies with her people and their fidelity to the ideals that drive them to live and die for their country.

One of the greatest tragedies that a slave nation suffers is loss of self-respect, pride and belief in her abilities and capabilities. Most European colonial powers subjugated Asian and African nations under the pretext of the *white man's burden*, as *a duty to civilise the savage*. Sri Aurobindo refuted any such claim of the Britishers about his motherland and exclaimed that his nation is not ordinary and a banal patch of land but extraordinary and unique, endowed with a greatness that has always remained *unsurmounted*:

We are no ordinary race. We are a people ancient as our hills and rivers and we have behind us a history of manifold greatness, not surpassed by any other race. We are the descendants of those who performed tapasya and underwent unheard-of austerities for the sake of spiritual gain and of their own will submitted to all the sufferings of which humanity is capable.

(CWSA, Vol. 8, p. 38)

We are no ordinary race — this mantra should be the guiding principle of our prayers and politics. Had we been *ordinary*, we might have vanished long ago and become a forgotten episode in history, a subject matter for anthropologists. But the *tapasya* (spiritual self-culture) of our forefathers saved us.

One of the unique aspects of Sri Aurobindo's idea of India is his spiritual interpretation of Sanatana Dharma and its inalienable relationship with the very spirit of India. According to Sri Aurobindo, we cannot imagine India without thinking of Sanatana Dharma. He believes that the resurgence of India was actually the resurgence and emergence of Sanatana Dharma. His 'Uttarpara Speech' is famous for the lights and new wisdom he gave about Sanatana Dharma. In that historical speech, Sri Aurobindo says,

When therefore it is said that India shall rise, it is the Sanatana Dharma that shall rise. When it is said that India shall be great, it is the Sanatana Dharma that shall be great. When it is said that India shall expand and extend herself, it is the Sanatana Dharma that shall expand and extend itself over the world. It is for the *dharma* and by the *dharma* that India exists.

(CWSA, Vol. 8, p. 10)

One of the things that we have not understood properly, even after seven decades of independence is the concept of Sanatana Dharma and its fulfilment in the national life. Based on cosmopolitan values and humanitarian ethos, Sanatana Dharma embraces the whole world with the eye of a friend. In India all great socio-political reformatory movements have begun as *religious movements*.

THE MISSION OF INDIA IN THE WORLD

a) To purge *barbarism out of humanity*.

This is another unique feature of Sri Aurobindo's idea of India. He believes that and, as a yogi spiritually realised it too, that India has a very unique duty for herself and the world. He saw a divine purpose behind the long subjugation and eventual freedom of India. In the 'Uttarpara Speech' he said,

India has always existed for humanity and not for herself and it is for humanity and not for herself that she must be great.

(CWSA, Vol. 8, p. 6)

It is as if God was preparing the soul of India through various sorrows and sufferings, setbacks and surprises, dishonours and denigrations. When many stalwarts were skeptical about India's freedom and her very existence as a large nation, Sri Aurobindo was convinced not only of her imminent political freedom but her role as a leader, champion of thought and world-teacher! As early as 1905 when he penned that revolutionary pamphlet *Bhawani Mandir*, he wrote,

India cannot perish, our race cannot become extinct, because among all the divisions of mankind, it is to India that is reserved the highest and the most splendid destiny, the most essential to the future of the human race. It is *she* who must send forth from herself the future religion of the entire world, the Eternal religion which is to harmonise all religion, science and philosophies and make mankind one soul. . . . it is her mission to purge barbarism (mlecchahood) out of humanity and to *aryanise* the world. In order to do this, she must first re-aryanise herself.

(CWSA Vol. 6, p. 84)

Here we need to understand the word Arya and assimilate the idea of India as Aryabhoomi, the land of Aryamaans or the Aryans. In comparison to *Hindu*, *Arya* is a very ancient word and is profusely used in classics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. In today's *highly cosmopolitan world* where national and regional identities are under constant threats, India needs to rediscover and rekindle her Arya bhava, the feeling of belonging to Aryabhoomi. Sri Aurobindo's idea of India is that of a nation which has been assigned by God *the most splendid destiny*. India has to become a rallying point for religions, philosophies, sciences and ideologies. It has to make mankind *one soul* and this earth a small global family. Oppression of children and women, religious bigotry, ideological fanaticism, terrorism and the onslaughts of pandemics have long marred the actual music of Life. India needs to restart the symphony of love and compassion, mutual progress and the orchestra of collective perfection.

b) To create *brotherhood of the soul*:

Sri Aurobindo believes that socialism, the oneness of spirit, will not come through political means and by the use of force and coercion. The brotherhood of the soul, the most essential condition for global peace, will come through realisation of human oneness, spearheaded by spirituality and yoga. And one of the missions of India in

the world is to create such conducive conditions where the efflorescence of true humanity and actual brotherhood is possible. In his long essay 'Asiatic Democracy', Sri Aurobindo writes,

Her [*India's*] mission is to point back humanity to the true source of human liberty, human equality, human brotherhood. When man is free in spirit, all other freedom is at his command, . . . When he is liberated from delusion, he perceives the divine equality of the world which fulfils itself through love and justice, and this perception transfuses itself into the law of government and society. When he has perceived this divine equality, he is brother to the whole world, and in whatever position he is placed he serves all men as his brothers by the law of love, by the law of justice.

(CWSA, Vol. 7, p. 931)

In the last 250 years, our world has witnessed violent and inhuman bloodshed in the name of political correctness and the *ideal of socialism and communism*. We can trace the seeds in the French revolution where ideals like liberty, equality and brotherhood first found their global significance and currency. But despite centuries having elapsed, there is not a single country which has lived these ideals! France, Russia, China, Cuba, Cambodia and North Korea have displayed immense barbarity and oppression in the name of *establishing socialism* but to no avail. Political ideologies have failed and will always be unsuccessful in touching the core of human hearts. No oneness and brotherhood is possible at gunpoint. Power will never generate the true fount of harmony. In such chaotic times, India can become a global herald of *divine liberty, divine equality and souls' brotherhood*. Everything can be achieved by *the law of love*. Love is the only and ultimate alchemy to bring real socialism on earth.

c) India's gift to the world: *yoga and spirituality*:

One of the missions of India is to make yoga and spirituality universal and ubiquitous, as a calming balm for ailing and agitated humanity. Only the universal expansion and percolation of spirituality and yoga can save mankind from an apocalypse and suicidal hubris and myopic vision. This remedy lies with India. In his book *The Renaissance in India*, Sri Aurobindo calls spirituality 'the master-key of the Indian mind' (p. 6). In the same book, the Mahayogi explains how India in the past tried to establish the entire life around spirituality and yoga and how that attempt gave it a distinct character in the world:

The whole root of difference between Indian and European culture springs from the spiritual aim of Indian civilisation. . . . A spiritual aspiration was the

governing force of this culture, its core of thought, its ruling passion. Not only did it make spirituality the highest aim of life, but it even tried, as far as that could be done in the past conditions of the human race, to turn the whole of life towards spirituality.

(CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 178)

The inherent character, *swabhava*, of our country is *spirituality*. In the seed-state, spirituality has always nourished the soul of this land, even when the outer body was being violently trampled upon by the marauders and looters. None could seize her soul, the fountainhead of her spirituality. Our best and most sublime devotional poetry emerged during the darkest and most dolorous hours of the medieval period. When political leadership was wiped away, spiritual and religious leadership emerged and took control of the country. India was never left like a waif.

Since 1947, the time of her independence, India has been continuously in a dilemma about her fundamental character, nature, line of development and growth. Most of the world is broadly divided into two categories, the capitalist world and the socialist world. Even the seemingly socialistic nations like China and Russia too are more or less capitalistic in their practical life. There are some countries with a strong military mettle, some have immense economic powers, some enjoy unbridled political clout and some have become hotspots of trade and industry. India seems at the crossroads and even after seven decades of our independence we are unable to follow some very specific line of our development as a nation. But there is no confusion and dilemma in the mind of Sri Aurobindo. He firmly believes that *India should follow spirituality as the guiding principle of her existence and develop her fundamental character according to that line*. In 1948, Sri Aurobindo wrote a message for the Andhra University. In that message, he said that instead of following the 'tempting directions' India should listen to her soul and become a spiritual country. There can be no greater glory for her than this and no greater tragedy if she leaves her essential nature and develops herself artificially:

There are deeper issues for India herself, since by following certain tempting directions she may conceivably become a nation like many others evolving an opulent industry and commerce, a powerful organisation of social and political life, an immense military strength, practising power-politics with a high degree of success . . . but in this apparently magnificent progression forfeiting its Swadharma, losing its soul. . . . It would be a tragic irony of fate if India were to throw away her spiritual heritage at the very moment when in the rest of the world there is more and more a turning towards her for spiritual help and a saving Light.

(CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 503-04)

Today's political leadership of the Centre and the States should pay heed to these words of the yogi-seer and try to model their vision of development on the line laid down by Sri Aurobindo. It is good that India is being recognised as an important market and a manufacturing hub, for soft skills and hard diplomatic gestures, for rocket science and scientific research but India's most valuable gift to herself and the world is yoga and spirituality. India will always be known for these two remarkable soft powers and no country under the blue sky can dethrone India from this position. In a world where threats of a third world war are looming large on the horizon, India can offer peace, amity and understanding to the jarring forces and create harmony. In this age of artificial intelligence, India can offer some genuine kindness and soothing wisdom.

HOW CAN INDIA FULFIL HER MISSION IN THE WORLD?

a) By becoming India *in the true sense*!

This advice may sound a little strange but it has the full stamp of truth in it. We do not become Indians only by being born in India! Spiritually one becomes an Indian only *after assimilating and identifying oneself with the spirit of India*. In the course of a thousand years of slavery, Indians have lost their inner contact with the soul of Bharat. Most of us do not know Sanskrit, the language in which India has expressed herself. We have very scanty knowledge and regard for our past and our traditions. The great classics, the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the marvellous texts on yoga and spirituality are missing from our bookshelves. In the past too, India fell to foreign bullets because the nation had already lost *her inner swaraj*. The beginning of resurrection should always be from the basics. That is why Sri Aurobindo is inspiring the youth of the nation to *become Indians first, to regain and recover their lost inner swaraj*, before they reclaim outer swaraj or political emancipation —

It is only the Indian who can believe everything, dare everything, sacrifice everything. First therefore become Indians. Recover the patrimony of your forefathers. Recover the Aryan thought, the Aryan discipline, the Aryan character, the Aryan life. Recover the Vedanta, the Gita, the Yoga. . . . Live them and you will be great and strong, mighty, invincible and fearless. Neither life nor death will have any terrors for you.

(CWSA, Vol. 8, pp. 27-28)

Words like these should have been prescribed in our syllabus for generations to inspire self-discovery and nation-building. As a sagacious politician, Sri Aurobindo is presenting before the youth the infallible road map for their all-round development.

He appealed that by *living* the Gita, Vedanta and Yoga, Indian youth could boldly face any tempest, as the key of becoming *invincible and fearless* shall be already in their hands.

Another suggestion from Sri Aurobindo for India's future course is that she should develop herself '*by becoming India*'. This, however, does not mean that India should ignore lights and wisdom coming from outside. But India should wisely assimilate the outer influences and inspirations and develop them according to her nature and need. In his magnificent book on Indian culture and spirituality, *The Renaissance in India*, Sri Aurobindo writes,

India can best develop herself and serve humanity by being herself and following the law of her own nature. This does not mean, as some narrowly and blindly suppose, the rejection of everything new that comes to us in the stream of Time or happens to have been first developed or powerfully expressed by the West. Such an attitude would be intellectually absurd, physically impossible, and above all unspiritual; true spirituality rejects no new light, no added means or materials of our human self-development. It means simply to keep our centre, our essential way of being, our inborn nature and assimilate to it all we receive. . . .

(CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 38)

The afore-mentioned words are signature quotes for the material realisation of *Sri Aurobindo's idea of India*. By becoming India in spirit and taking nourishment from yoga and spirituality, she can best serve *herself and the world*. Each nation has its unique character and innate form and, when it comes to India, spirituality can be comfortably called her innate character and Swabhava. She should welcome lights and luminosity from everywhere in the world but '*keep the centre intact*' and take outside inspiration only after proper osmosis and assimilation. Some of us, should I say most of us, have become more and more occidental in our approach to life and our way of life; but this is tragic and a great blow to the body of the motherland. An Indian can never be an Englishman, as much as a Japanese cannot behave like a native of Afghanistan. It's high time we start the *decolonisation of our mind* and feel proud of our Indianness and, as the Mahayogi suggests, recover and rediscover the spirit of India and inundate ourselves in the white radiance of her spirituality and yoga.

b) By Dharma and Spirituality!

Many people, specially the urban anglicised *intellectuals* who are extremely influenced by the West and Western education, believe that too much religion and religious exuberance has been one of the reasons behind India's downfall and her prolonged slavery under different colonial powers. They mock their own mores and manners, festivals and faiths. Such people easily ignore the tradition of thought and

independent enquiry ingrained in Sanatana Dharma. For them dharma is but mumbo jumbo and a bundle of rituals! There are authors, *historians and intellectuals* around who believe that *too much religion has spoiled India's destiny*. They state that we failed and fell due to an overdose of religious fervour in social life. But the Mahayogi does not buy such puerile narratives. He is the one who has assimilated the very spirit of India, her spirituality and Sanatana Dharma. Exposing such mendacious accounts in his book *The Renaissance in India*, he writes,

Religion has been a central preoccupation of the Indian mind; some have told us that too much religion ruined India, precisely because we made the whole of life religion or religion the whole of life, we have failed in life and gone under. I will not answer, adopting the language used by the poet in a slightly different connection, that our fall does not matter and that the dust in which India lies is sacred. The fall, the failure does matter, and to lie in the dust is no sound position for man or nation. But the reason assigned is not the true one. If the majority of Indians had indeed made the whole of their lives religion in the true sense of the word, we should not be where we are now; it was because their public life became most irreligious, egoistic, self-seeking, materialistic that they fell.

(CWSA, Vol. 20, pp. 38-39)

India has been preeminently the land of the Dharma and the Shastra

(CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 9)

and dharma has always been present in India with great regard for diversity of life and expressions. It was dharma that saved and sustained India in her darkest times. We were defeated and enslaved not because of dharma but because of our selfishness, hypocrisy and mutual rancour. Sri Aurobindo should be read again and again before people speak about dharma and its connection with India's slavery.

There is also a widespread belief in India (and some religious schools still harbour the same belief and vehemently support it!) that in order to gain the desired results in religion and spirituality, one needs to observe a chill penurious lifestyle and a life of hardship and austerities. In his *idea and appreciation of India*, the Mahayogi opined that,

. . . there was never a national ideal of poverty in India . . . nor was bareness or squalor the essential setting of her spirituality.

(CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 34)

The whole world is a manifestation of Godhead and there is nothing at all that can be labelled mundane and ordinary. Money and other outer means too are essential ingredients of the platter called Life. The Mahayogi says,

It is a great error to suppose that spirituality flourishes best in an impoverished soil with the life half-killed and the intellect discouraged and intimidated. The spirituality that so flourishes is something morbid, hectic and exposed to perilous reactions. It is when the race has lived most richly and thought most profoundly that spirituality finds its heights and its depths and its constant and many-sided fruition.

(CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 10)

There is great clarity in the aforesaid lines of Sri Aurobindo. It is but stupidity to think that spirituality and religious spirit thrive in poverty. Nobody cares about a banana republic, poor and unproductive. A nation needs to live *most richly and profoundly* in order to realise the full fruition in spirit. Ours is the land of all-embracing vision of life. Some of the most radiant stars on the spiritual firmament of India have been princes and powerful kings, Janaka, Buddha and Mahaveer are but a few glowing examples. Spirituality and even religious austerities have nothing to do with an outer asceticism and a penurious life. Money and opulence too is an aspect of the Divine and there should be no aversion to it. We can be a great spiritual country by tapping all our material and economic resources to the fullest and developing decent life conditions for our people. We can be deeply spiritual and religious people and yet economically, militarily, politically a super power. True spirituality does not advise one to shun life and retire into the majestic but solitary calm of woods; true spirituality inspires and prepares us to live and express our full potentiality and develop a deep and universal bond of love and friendliness based on the inherent divinity in all.

c) By the power of Thought!

Another way of realising the mission of India is the power of thought which is one of the greatest powers of the universe. Those nations have become the most powerful in the world only because of the power of thought. America invited and opened her heart to the best talent pool from everywhere and provided them with freedom of thought, ample resources and an amicable atmosphere of professional growth and career opportunities. As a result America scaled ladders of progress unimaginable for other countries even today! If Americans can achieve the unthinkable, why can't India? But in order to match their standards, we need to clear our basics: we need a transparent and progressive government, ample, unbiased and honourable career opportunities, resources and a work culture of very high standards. We need to invest in the process of thought. The thinking process alone is the basis of multi-dimensional progress. An honest and enviable work culture and governmental encouragement will prevent brain drain, inviting the best minds to invest their skill, expertise and energies in their own motherland. One recent example of this culture of fairness and

encouragement has been India's vaccine making progress. Our scientists proved that we could achieve miracles if there is ample support from the system and trust of the nation. India prepared indigenous vaccines and, as a gesture of brotherhood and goodwill, supplied them to many needy, suffering and poor countries. Such is the power of thought and innovative approach! Voltaire, the great French philosopher used to say,

When once a nation begins to think, it is impossible to stop it.

(Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy*, p. 261)

Thought is the most potent tool of materialising Sri Aurobindo's idea of India and making the *mission of India* a success. In 1893, when he touched the shores of India after fourteen years, he read about the people and their plight, learnt their tongues, scanned the methods and manners of the then Indian National Congress and seriously thought over all the possible reasons of India's prolonged subjugation and humiliation. In a letter written to his younger brother and famous revolutionary Barindra Kumar Ghose, Sri Aurobindo showed his disappointment in these words:

I am fully persuaded that the origin of the weakness of India is neither political servitude nor material poverty, still less the dearth of spirituality: we have degenerated because of the wanting of our capacity to think and concentrate. Except for a few solitary giants everywhere you meet the average man who has no strength and who does not want to think nor can.

(Dilip Kumar Roy, *Sri Aurobindo Came to Me*, p. 9)

Sri Aurobindo thinks that *thinking is the first necessity for a nation to thrive and throb*. Nations die because of their incapacity to think and create solutions for their most pressing problems. In contemporary India too, this is a great malaise. Our education, even higher education, is unable to alleviate our myopia, our racial, caste-based discrimination and communal acrimony and distrust. Instead of acting as a *bridge*, education has become a *trench* for us. But there is a possibility and a *promise* for us if we care to listen to Sri Aurobindo. *Independent thinking*, for Sri Aurobindo, is the need for us if we wish to survive and thrive:

Our first necessity, if India is to survive and do her appointed work in the world, is that the youth of India should learn to think, — to think on all subjects, to think independently, fruitfully, going to the heart of things, not stopped by their surface, free of prejudgments, shearing sophism and prejudice asunder as with a sharp sword, smiting down obscurantism of all kinds as with the mace of Bhima. . . . India can never cease to be India or Hinduism to be Hinduism, if we really think for ourselves.

(CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 40-41)

This mindset has not fully left us. Many a time we still naively believe that America will think for us, Russia will think for us. But for every nation, their self-interests come first and they have to think of their own country first. It is high time we come out from this delusion. What a key Sri Aurobindo has handed over to us: think for yourselves.

d) By Pluralism and multi-faceted Diversity

Pluralism and diversity of life are *India's greatest strength and one of the most fundamental reasons for its longevity* as a civilisation. In his essays on diversity Sri Aurobindo writes,

... uniformity is not the law of life. Life exists by diversity ...

(CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 513)

India is the world's most diverse country with unimaginable variation and shades of life, languages, cultures, creeds, cuisines, belief-systems, classes, mores, communities and regions. In 1983, when India became world champion in cricket, our team had representation of all major religions of India! This syncretic fibre of our society is one of the greatest spectacular phenomena of the world. It is a matter of great concern that in recent years *there has been a growing gloom of communal disharmony, religious acrimony and mutual distrust*. We have forgotten that India's diversity and our catholicity for '*the other*', our adaptability to times and situations is our strength. It is high time that intellectual patrons of the society stood up against any divisive forces and stood by India. Our unity in diversity, our collective forces, synergy, against the tornadoes of Times is our ultimate sheet anchor, our bulwark. Sri Aurobindo was a great supporter of communal harmony and his Ashram at Pondicherry is *a living lab of new humanity, a crucible of his teachings* and a cradle of communal friendliness. To Sri Aurobindo, religion is, at best, *the scaffolding* of the temple of *spirituality*. And every religion has done some marvellous work to make this temple of spirituality possible. All faiths are equally respectable and acceptable. In *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, he writes,

Each religion has helped mankind. Paganism increased in man the light of beauty, the largeness and height of his life, his aim at a many-sided perfection; Christianity gave him some vision of divine love and charity; Buddhism has shown him a noble way to be wiser, gentler, purer, Judaism and Islam how to be religiously faithful in action and zealously devoted to God; Hinduism has opened to him the largest and profoundest spiritual possibilities. A great thing would be done if all these God-visions could embrace and cast themselves into each other; but intellectual dogma and cult egoism stand in the way.

(CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 211)

Whenever we see bloodshed on the road in the name of race and religion, paths and prophets, we should understand that *intellectual dogma* and *cult egoism* have become devils and are fighting against humanity's efflorescence. Man is his own greatest enemy.

He loves his imperfections. . . .

(CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 210)

e) By becoming *young* again!

India is a young nation and therefore *pregnant with possibilities*! This demographic dividend can surely be a blessing for our country and provide an edge over countries with small or ageing populations. Sri Aurobindo has great faith in the youth power and he kept inspiring the youth throughout his eventful life. As a leader and scholar, he is of the opinion that once the youth decide to build a great and invincible nation, it is impossible to stop them. Youth power can change the stream of Time and script a new and vibrant story for earth, steeped in mirth and magnanimity. He inspired a treasure trove of powers and wisdom like Subhash Chandra Bose, K. M. Munshi, Jawaharlal Nehru and a host of others. Through his revelatory speeches and essays he exhorted the youth to come out of stagnancy and lethargy, emotional weakness and mental myopia and work for the nation. While bidding goodbye (expecting that his incarceration was imminent) to the young students of Bengal National College in 1907, he gave them the following *advice*:

There are times in a nation's history when Providence places before it one work, one aim, to which everything else, however high and noble in itself, has to be sacrificed. Such a time has now arrived for our motherland when nothing is dearer than her service, when everything else is to be directed to that end. . . . Work that she may prosper. Suffer that she may rejoice. All is contained in that one single advice.

(CWSA, Vol. 7, pp. 656-57)

Today, sky-high ideals like these sound near impossible. Corruption has choked the growth of the nation and everybody is trying, by hook or crook, to fulfil their desires. National assets and resources are exploited for personal gain and unwarranted opulence, for swagger and sophistry. In this doom of gloom, who will hear Sri Aurobindo's magical advice: "Work that she may prosper. Suffer that she may rejoice."? It seems that a large population of the country has blissfully forgotten the sacrifices and pains behind this hardwon independence and today we see scant regard for icons and ideals of our glorious past. We as a nation need to rekindle that Samurai spirit, the audacity of the hero warriors, the tenacity of unruffled leaders.

We need to refresh our bond with our motherland and perform our best for her progress and peace, growth and greatness. Here, our youth can play a pivotal role in nation building.

In *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo opines what kind of youth India needs and why such youth power is indispensable for her future:

Our call is to young India. It is the young who must be the builders of the new world, — not those who accept the competitive individualism, the capitalism or the materialistic communism of the West as India's future ideal, nor those who are enslaved to old religious formulas and cannot believe in the acceptance and transformation of life by the spirit, but all who are free in mind and heart to accept a completer truth and labour for a greater ideal.

(CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 511)

Surely, the youth are the '*builders of the new world*' and architects of new humanity. This is specially relevant for a young and resurgent nation like India with a large youthful population, bustling with dreams and desires. Yes, it is the responsibility of our politicians and policy makers to provide unbiased and ample opportunities for their development and full blossoming of their inherent potential. Sri Aurobindo's vision for the youth is remarkable; but we must remember that his call is only for those youth who are not besotted by *competitive individualism and capitalism* of the West (which played a great role in dehumanising the human world) and, as often happens in our country, who are also not *enslaved by religious formulas*, fanaticism and orthodoxies. He calls for a youth power that is free in mind and heart, open and receptive towards the power of spirit, that transcends all other powers. By tapping youth power, we can best fulfil our destiny as role model and world-teacher. Our youth power is our possibility.

CONCLUSION:

Sri Aurobindo continues to inspire generation after generation of people who want to know about and identify the spirit of India, *Bhawani Bharati* or *Bharata Shakti* as he called his motherland. Right from the very beginning of his political journey, as a speaker in secret societies like 'Lotus and Dagger' and the Indian Majlis in London, he was very much aware of the divine character of India. India as Divine Mother, as Bhawani, as Kali. In his poem *Bhawani Bharati* (1907) he worships India as Mahakali, shackled in the chains of subjugation. And right after setting his feet on the soil of India, Sri Aurobindo always envisaged a free and liberated India. During the trial of the Alipore bomb case in 1908, Deshbandhu C. R. Das while defending Sri Aurobindo, called him the *poet of patriotism, prophet of nationalism and lover of humanity*. He was indeed a lover of India, Bhawani Bharati and sacrificed

everything for her sake. It was he who established nationalism *as a new religion* first in Bengal and then everywhere in India. It was he who realised the need to connect the masses to the ideal of India's independence. It was he who gave new meanings and magnificence to the cry of 'Bande Mataram' by Rishi Bankim, through his pen and poetry. K. R. S. Iyengar, one of the best critic-scholars on Sri Aurobindo, calls him 'the fiery evangelist of Nationalism' (*Indian Writing in English*, 1985, p. 144) who still needs to be properly read and reflected upon in his own country.

Today's India needs more than ever the spirit and spiritual force, the patriotic fire and the literary luminosity of Sri Aurobindo. We are still far from the India of his dreams. Our youth are abysmally divided into caste and communal lines, poets have become pigmy mouthpieces for power corridors and politicians with that vision are lacking. The choking rivers and litter-stifled cities are living proof that much needs to be done to lift India to the stature of her past glory. We need to re-establish our relationship with India; instead of taking her as a piece of land, we need to embrace her as *mother*, a *Shakti*, who becomes Shakti only by the surrender and sincerity of her children. It is satisfying that India is becoming a *global power* in technology, science, business, engineering, art and military power. We are proud of the fact that some of the best ventures in the world are being run or controlled by people *born and educated* in India. It is also heartening to see that our position is changing on international platforms, and many nations of the world have started showing specific regard for India, for what she stands for and is an idolon of. But all these factors are not sufficient reason to feel proud of India and sit smugly complacent. The *India that Sri Aurobindo wanted to see is a spiritual India, a divine laboratory of superhumanity, a cradle of creativity and a promise of the Superman*. The hubris of people in politics and bureaucracy, our style of functioning as a democracy and the collective mindset of our masses needs a radical overhaul. Dr. Beloo Mehra explains insightfully the idea of Sri Aurobindo's India and highlights the points which make present India more a 'colonial copy' than a resurgent young nation:

In Sri Aurobindo's vision, the modern and free Indian nation was not meant to be a colonial copy with an outer machinery of elaborate bureaucratic structures left over by the British and now merely-to-be-filled by the Indians. . . . He envisioned the rebirth of a nation which will be grounded in India's unique temperament shaped by her spiritual genius and conscious of her true mission.

(Mehra, *Understanding Contemporary India in the Light of Sri Aurobindo*, pp. 65-66)

The million rupee question is: can India try to understand, assimilate and appreciate Sri Aurobindo's life and legacy and, more significantly, his *idea of India*? We may be late but we are not surely *very late*. And can there be a more propitious hour than this when India is celebrating Sri Aurobindo's 150th birth anniversary? More

than people in power, the onus of this work is on the shoulders of those who are 'the thinking class' — sound minds in media, academia, independent think tanks, scholars, writers, poets and painters. Thirteen years back François Gautier, a French national based in India and an authority on Indology, held the mirror before Indians through his column in *Outlook*, the Indian news magazine. He called Sri Aurobindo 'the true father of Indian independence' and lamented that,

If we, in France, had a great man such as Sri Aurobindo . . . we would cherish him endlessly. His poetry would be taught to children, his philosophical works would be part of the university curriculums, books would be written about him, museums would be built . . .

(*Outlook*, April 13, 2009, p. 14)

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We are surrounded on all sides by forces which we cannot control. As man has a perpetual desire for freedom, he is driven by forces he cannot control. Under the influence of these forces within or without, action takes place. The object of Hindu philosophy is to make man no longer a slave, but to escape from bondage and to make human beings free. Hindu philosophy tries to go into the root of things. What is the real beginning of maya? . . . Whatever we may try, from the nature of the world we cannot escape from bondage. There is a knowledge, by attaining which we can become free.

Sri Aurobindo

(Karmayogin, CWSA, Vol. 8, p. 48)

SAHANA'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO — V

(Continued from the issue of December 2022)

Dear Mother, I find that towards the evening an aspiration from within rises upwards with a good deal of intensity, but at noon there is nothing of that kind. At times a sense of emptiness and boredom comes over me and I feel lonely. It can be driven away, but that intensity does not come back. A condition of being neither here nor there is very painful. It is almost suffocating to remain in this middle zone.

It is best to take these movements as a means first of knowing what part of the being is still unchanged or imperfectly changed and then of bringing into it the true condition. As here it is evidently the physical vital consciousness that has still not lost the social instinct and the need of social pleasure. Don't get discouraged when these things come, but react with a quiet confidence that this must change and will change. (2.4.33)

*

Mother mine, I feel so ashamed to speak to you of all these utterly futile talks. Please correct the impure motive that may be lurking behind them. Whatever be the true motive that may not be detected by me, it will be clear to you and my purpose will be served. I feel at ease after unburdening myself to you. What would be the best thing to do?

To confess or speak to the Mother what you knew was always right and could have only a good effect — but not to yield to jealousy and other passions and the conduct that came from it. If anything good came out of that, it was because the Divine Will overruled all for a good result, otherwise there could have been disastrous consequences. (4.4.33)

*

Mother, today, I sang for an hour, expressing my ardent prayer to you and, on getting up, I at once wrote this letter. I lost myself entirely in you. That feeling is still throbbing inside. It was as if my whole being had fallen at your feet and been making this prayer intensely. I shall simply send this song of Rabindranath

with slight changes made by me and offer my humble prayer through the song:

*O Mother, do accept me now,
 Don't turn me back again,
 Possess my rebel heart,
 With me remain!
 The days that have gone by
 I call no longer nigh,
 Let them fall to dust.
 "To keep open to thy Light"
 Should be my life's refrain.
 What lures, what voices
 Made me roam here and there
 In the wild waste!
 Now with thy face close to my breast
 Let me catch thy wondrous strain.
 All darkness and deception
 Still hide in my secret heart,
 O Mother, burn in thy pure fire —
 Turn me not back again!*

Yes, that is the way. The intensity of the aspiration brings the intensity of the experience and by repeated intensity of the experience the change. (5.4.33)

*

Mother, I am aspiring for that condition, that Ananda which, once obtained even for a short while, makes one realise what it is to live with impatience and dryness.

It is sure to come back — let there be such a foundation that it can remain. (7.4.33)

*

Mother, I want so much that my attachment should go, but alas, I don't see any effect. I feel very depressed. How shall I be free from the bondage? It seems I am just where I was. What then is the way?

You should not indulge this sense of grief — remain calm, confident, turned to the one Will in all circumstances, that is the way to be secure that each step will be taken in the right measure and produce its best possible consequences. Regard henceforth

the question of Y and your relation as a minor and subordinate thing on the other side of your sadhana. If you take it as a problem of the first importance it will become that and stand in your way again, look at it as a question from the past that has been firmly settled and put in its place and turn to the central aim of your sadhana.

For the rest, apart from this, circumstances need change nothing in the inward aim and concentrate your will and endeavour on the one thing to be done — the entire self-giving and self-dedication of your inner and outer being to the Divine alone. If you can adopt firmly the right inward attitude, it may even be easier so than by a strong compression on your outer movements with the wall of an outward rule for your main protection. (18.4.33)

*

Mother, have I still to write about this coming and going? I thought it would be better not to do it, for writing about it would mean remembering. So long as there is no difficulty, I should not refer to it. But I leave the decision to you.

I think you are right. It is no use any longer thinking always about him. Only when you need to write or that there is anything we ought to know as regards yourself in that connection — a marked progress or any serious difficulty. (12.4.33)

*

Dear Mother, last night at about 10 p.m. suddenly my defects of judging this man and that man, accompanied by some expectations from them, attacked me. I was almost upset to see them still lurking in me. Fortunately as suddenly everything became quiet within and I recollected Mother saying once that we should be happy to notice our defects, for it would give us a chance to conquer them. Then I remembered Sri Aurobindo's writing the same thing to me, and instead of being upset a quiet will and aspiration arose to face and reject them, keeping myself detached. Then there was relief and a feeling that the proper attitude had come.

Yes, all depends on that. For so long as they are not rejected altogether, they will try to rise. (13.4.33)

*

Mother, this time I must come out of this vicious circle. Whatever may be the difficulty, I must not succumb but rise above it.

Keep to that and it will be much easier. It is the getting upset that depresses the consciousness and the strength and so gives the enemy their chance. (14.4.33)

*

I am so contented when I feel that I am nothing more than an instrument.

It is very good that all has come back so strongly. It is the full surrender of the vital. (19.4.33)

*

I am quite happy and cheerful, the ananda and the sense of beautiful love and deep devotion is there. Only I hope today my talking too much did not do any harm.

If it is only occasional, it ought not to have any effect. (23.4.33)

*

Mother, the peculiar thing is this that I can understand the whole thing so well, so clearly, but if I just pay a little attention to the feelings of sentiment, all other things surge up with it; one has to be so careful all the time!

It is just what you have not to do. Fling it back decisively and briefly and do not let your mind dwell in this idea. Keep the gate shut on these hostile forces and their suggestions. (26.4.33)

*

I am very well in most respects by your Grace, only a pull is there of the old habit of inquisitiveness and curiosity of the physical mind. I was able to separate myself from this movement (of habit) as something which was passing through me, and I was simply looking at it without paying any attention, but the pull of which I have written drew my attention in that direction. I was calling you calmly and refused quietly to pay any attention. Mother, I am writing to you only to let you know about the pull so that it may not do any mischief. It was like this: a small part of me was feeling this pull to turn and look at what was going on — and all the other parts saw this quite clearly. I felt it was not I but a part of me and even that was also not quite connected as there was a sense of separateness, I felt detached.

It is by separateness that the elimination becomes possible. (5.5.33)

*

Mother, will you please explain to me what you mean by your Mahakali method? Why don't you use this method with everybody?

All these things depend on the person, the condition, the circumstances. The Mother uses the method you speak of, the Mahakali method, (1) with those in whom there is a great eagerness to progress and a fundamental sincerity somewhere even in the vital, (2) with those whom she meets intimately and who she knows will not resent or misunderstand her severity or take it for a withdrawal of kindness or grace but will regard it as a true grace and help to their sadhana. There are others who cannot bear this method — if it was continued they would run a thousand miles away in misunderstanding and revolt and despair. What the Mother wants is for people to have their full chance for their soul, be the method short and swift or long and tortuous. Each she must treat according to his nature. (9.5.33)

*

When I have done something wrong I suffer from it and I torture myself.

It is a certain excess and exaggeration somewhere in your vital. A greater constant calm and control in your vital — the whole of it — is necessary. For these movements do not help — they prevent a quick recovery and shake the nerves and the body and push to unreasoned action. (20.5.33)

*

I understand well that unless I can be free from the ego, there is no deliverance for me. Yet this ego doesn't seem to budge at all. Then I doubt if I would be able to continue my sadhana. The thought of going away also often comes to the mind.

It is the same irrational tendency in the vital — pushed by a strong ego-feeling. It is through that the adverse force acts and the impulse towards going away is one of the favourite suggestions of this force with the purpose of breaking the yoga. (20.5.33)

*

When one wants to wipe out the past and build up one's future with you as the guide, why then should there be so much attachment for the fallen remnants of the past? Should the memory always be in bondage even after understanding all this?

It is because the old habitual ways of thinking and feeling have still roots in the physical mind and vital and subconscious; you have either to root them out or to work them out. (22.5.33)

*

Mother, I feel so happy to be alone. Have you permitted this, because I wanted it? Or because you thought it to be necessary for me? If it was a mistake on my part or if I have taken a wrong path to isolate myself in this way, then I will do gladly whatever you want me to do.

It is best for your sadhana to be apart. (2.6.33)

*

Mother, the last two days I wake up at night with a kind of twisting pain in my chest. The feeling at that time is like this: "What has happened? Why has it so happened?" Everything appears strange. In my waking consciousness, there is no such perception of pain. It comes in sleep, and when I am awake I drive it away; but at the same time the mind keeps on thinking that still there is some attachment in the subconscious and I feel bad about it. I can't free myself from the brooding concern that the attachment is lingering still, the result being a short period of depression. Why should this happen?

You need not attach too much importance to it. It is an impression left in the subconscious — necessarily a strong impression because the feelings were acute — which as it can no longer affect the waking state comes up in dreams. It is a common experience that long after one has got rid of things in the waking state, e.g., sex, family attachment or any past preoccupations that no longer exist, they return from time to time in dreams. Your self-liberation is quite recent, so it is not surprising that the impression comes up in this form. You have to reject it very quietly and without concern — if it is not fed in the waking state it will die away.

My ego has found so much support from me in everything that it now doesn't want to leave me so easily. It must stay either in front or behind, openly or in secret. What I see clearly, or am aware of and about which there is no doubt — even there the ego peeps! What a dismal aspect of human nature!

It is so with everybody, because the human consciousness is permeated in all its past ideas with this substance of egoism. It is only by a constant quiet vigilance and increasing consciousness that it can be got out — for if it is not allowed to play openly, it conceals itself and takes subtle and disguised forms. (8.6.33)

*

Mother sweet, an attitude of indifference that I should no longer defend myself has now come upon me. To justify and defend myself constantly to others appears so disgusting. Since you have made me conscious that all these movements are born of ego, enable me then to remain in that consciousness.

This indifference or equality will be a great progress towards getting the true spiritual attitude. (12.6.33)

*

Mother dear, this seems to be a vital movement in me, for to feel like singing all the time as a result of some pressure of ananda, as if I were under some intoxication, can't be a sign of the psychic. Besides, I myself understand clearly that it is a vital movement, because there is no control. The psychic is accompanied by a sense of quiet and collectedness whereas the vital is under excitement and restlessness. Am I not right, Mother? I should have restrained myself, I feel. That I became too impatient is a clear sign of the vital movement. It was a mistake to yield to it, isn't it so?

Obviously, when there is that inability to control and overeagerness, it must be the movement of a vital nature. The vital can take part in a movement but it must not be in control — it must be subordinated to the psychic. (18.6.33)

*

Again stark darkness, and a surge of weeping. No concentration at all. That I can't move forward towards you is what is most depressing. It is true that the things I loved once are dropping off and that gives joy, but if it is not followed by an intimacy with you as a result, if I can't advance forward, then what do I gain? What I felt to be the greatest obstacle on the path has been removed, but I remain where I am and consequently within there is a terrible dryness. That I can't look at the relation between so and so in a better light is also galling to me. The vital nature refuses to come under control; the upshot is that my mind is shattered. I am carrying my own self like a burden — a lifeless corpse.

What you have felt is a revival or return on you of the lower vital with its demands and desires. Its suggestion is “I am doing the Yoga but for a price. I have abandoned the life of vital desire and satisfaction but in order to get intimacy with the Mother — instead of satisfying myself with X and the world, to satisfy myself and get my desires fulfilled by the Divine. If I do not get the intimacy with the Mother and immediately and as I want it, why should I give up the old things.” And as a natural result the old things start again — “X and Y and Y and X and the wrongs of Sahana.” You must see this machinery of the lower vital and dismiss it. It is only by the full psychic relation of self-giving that unity and closeness with the Divine can be maintained — the other is part of the vital ego movement and can only bring a fall of the consciousness and disturbance. (20.6.33)

*

Reading Sri Aurobindo's letter, I got terribly upset and felt that I wouldn't be able to do sadhana. I have left everything for you alone; still if I feel sad that I don't get the intimacy in the way I want it and you call that sadness a vital demand, then how should I want it? I do want you and, for that, I am trying my best to follow your directions, but if that does not bring me closer to you, and the intimacy within doesn't deepen, then it is quite natural that I should feel sad and be in despair about myself. It is clear that I am not able to do what should be done.

It was from your description of the reaction that I said there was a vital demand. In the pure psychic or spiritual self-giving there are no reactions of this kind; no despondency or despair, no saying “What have I gained by seeking the Divine,” no anger, revolt, abhiman, wish to go away — such as you describe here — but an absolute confidence, and a persistence in clinging to the Divine under all conditions. That is what I wanted you to have; it is the only basis on which one is free from troubles and reactions and goes steadily forward. (21.6.33)

*

If to want you is desire, then what is called the aspiration of the soul? The discontent that issues from my inability to want you heartily was, I thought, discontent of my soul, the soul's aspiration. That was something pure in me, I believed. Now, alas, it is not so; it is impure, it is desire! How helpless am I still before my lower nature and when I see this the despair comes with double force.

But are such feelings a sign of the soul's self-giving? If there is no vital mixture how do these things come when I write to you and as the result of my writing and trying to show you the way? (21.6.33)

*

Now I feel very much better. Though the attitude is clear, there is still a heaviness within. I don't know how Sri Aurobindo's letter evoked a spirit of revolt and came like an attack. And yet when I read this letter again, I found that there was nothing to produce this revolt. My head was all on fire!

It is the first movement of this part to revolt when it is shown its own nature and asked to change. (21.6.33)

*

Mother, please, don't put me off by simply saying "Dismiss" and all that. Tell me just what I can do. I am quite willing to work hard, but the things you say or ask are so difficult that I feel as if I am lost on a wide sea, and the word "impossible" is all that I can utter.

Difficult? It is the first principle of our sadhana that surrender is the means of fulfilment and so long as ego or vital demand and desire are cherished, complete surrender is impossible — the self-giving is incomplete. We have never concealed that. It may be difficult and it is; but it is the very principle of the sadhana. Because it is difficult, it has to be done steadily and patiently till the work is complete. (21.6.33)

*

Mother, why at times do things appear so difficult? Again, the more they are difficult the greater is the joy in surmounting them. This is a very pathetic condition: swaying between the possible and the impossible. Now to get out of the grip of the lower vital is the problem I have to answer.

You have to go on rejecting the vital mixture every time it rises. If you are steadfast in rejecting, it will lose more and more of its force and fade out. (21.6.33)

*

Mother, please don't suppose that I have been weak enough to want back what I have once given up. Not at all, in spite of all hard struggle. Those incidents

regarding X and Y have all been completely excised from my memory. Still a tension is there. I know that ego, self-love, self-importance are at the root of it all, but at the same time I forget it all as quickly. It has been reduced to a tiny little thing, but how persistently it sticks, like a leech! My God, problems and problems!

That means it is an obstinate but irrational and mechanical survival of the old movement. That in fact is how these things do try to survive. It is bound to go if you do not give it fresh life. (23.6.33)

*

My mind says how happy it will be when it will be quite free from these bad thoughts! What else shall I write to you, Mother? Do make me free for ever so that not a tinge abides anywhere — make a clean sweep!

I have no doubt of it — you have only to understand it rightly and you can get at once to the right ground. (23.6.33)

*

I went to hear the part-recital of a famous drama in someone's house. I liked it, I must say, but the inner being doesn't respond as before in a different atmosphere. I enjoyed it but not with my whole self. Some part watches always the movement of other parts. Nowadays many things which remained at one time unnoticed, are now easily detected, because the vision has turned inward so that I am becoming clearer to my own eyes. Therefore it is no longer possible to enjoy things, in a state unaware of myself. There is always something watching one's varied movements.

It is a great and indispensable progress to have reached this condition. (10.7.33)

*

Dear Mother, this morning as I was getting up after pranam I saw a sadhak meditating. I saw with open eyes a bright blue light on the wall behind him. A sort of meditative mood came upon me, as I kept on watching the light. Then I closed my eyes; after a while when I opened them, there was such a dazzling golden light that I could look only for some instants. Then I saw not only light, but a figure of light. As soon as I tried to concentrate on it, it vanished. Again, when my mind turned towards you, suddenly this glittering light on the wall

attracted my sight. I looked at it for quite some time. Was it really a vision or something else?

The bright blue light was probably the light of the spiritualised mind and the golden light is that of the higher planes of knowledge. Probably it was the light of some Being you saw projected before you, but the vision not being developed you did not see the figure clearly. Sometimes these lights are those of some form or Power of the Mother — many see like that. (20.7.33)

*

In ordinary life, we boast so much of our reason and judgement, but there is no end of error in these judgements.

It is not a question of ordinary life. In ordinary life people always judge wrongly because they judge by mental standards and generally by conventional standards. The human mind is an instrument not of truth but of ignorance and error. (25.8.33)

*

Mother, we struggle so much over your outer contact, but the inner contact is of no less importance. Then why don't we yearn for it as much as we do for the outer contact?

The outward touch is helpful, but the inward is still more helpful when one is accustomed to receive it with a certain concreteness — and the outward touch is not always fully possible, while the inward can be there all the time.

Mother, very often I observe that those persons with whom we live have ways of life different from ours. These don't quite agree with our ways. For this reason an irritation is caused and a kind of uneasiness lingers in the mind. Is there a way to get rid of it at the very root?

What you say is right. Those one lives with have always some ways and manners that do not agree with one's own and may grate on the mind. To observe quietly and not resent is part of the discipline in life. Not to be moved or affected at all but to see with equanimity the play of one Nature in all is the discipline of sadhana.

My vital (external) seems to be like an untrained horse — so impulsive that it is hard to control it. It will not come under any discipline easily, and is happy to roam about at its sweet fancy. However, since you have said that the external vital

must undergo some discipline, I have taken up an attitude to follow regarding work. It seems some good result is coming, thanks to your Grace.

It is true that for the external vital an outer discipline is necessary for the purification, otherwise it remains restless and fanciful and at the mercy of its own impulse — so that no basis can be built there for a quiet and abiding higher consciousness to remain firmly. The attitude you have taken for the work is of course the best one, and applying it steadily the progress you feel was bound to come and is sure to increase.

I see very well that my consciousness has become externalised. When shall I become free from taking interest in the discussions and criticisms made by other people? One part of mine is very eager to join in the discussions. Now it is kept down; otherwise it will pop up at any opportunity. At times in moods of confidence I feel that I have nothing to do with these things. But alas, the moods don't last and I lose my proper condition. However, when a veil falls upon the light of awareness, it produces a suffocation and I cry, "Oh how I wish I could get out of this intolerable situation!"

It is also better to be more strict about not talking of others and criticising them with the ordinary mind — not only in the case of Y and X but all. It is necessary in order to develop a deeper consciousness and outlook on things that understands in silence the movements of Nature in oneself and others and is not moved or disturbed or superficially interested and drawn into an external movement.

Dismiss all that and get back into your poise. (26.8.33)

*

Mother, this evening I sang and felt much better, as if some light was there. Otherwise the whole day was in a neutral state. The vital and the psychic alternating with each other and thereby bringing endless joy and endless suffering. What an upheaval!

It is because this has been a constant and long-indulged habit. These habits of the physical vital are almost automatic in their action and it takes either a very strong will or a persistent effort of self-discipline to get out of this automatic, almost reflex action. You should not therefore be discouraged by the difficulty, but go on with the necessary perseverance of the will to press it out of existence. (27.8.33)

*

Rejection has to be done: I know it but to yield oneself again and again to what has to be rejected is a condition I cannot bear, nor the suffering caused by it.

The lower vital is not a part that listens to reason. There is no why to its action; it acts in a particular way because it has long been accustomed to act in that way, and it goes on even if the doing brings a painful reaction. (27.8.33)

*

I want to ask one question. Wherever I see anyone affected by doubt, disbelief or disturbance my aspiration and faith become more firm. These things never touch me; on the contrary my faith and aspiration surround and protect me like an armour, as it were. Very concretely I feel in me an unshakable faith at all times. Others' disbelief seems rather to increase my strength. Isn't it strange? Is there any meaning in it?

It is the natural reaction of the psychic to mental doubt and the vital disturbance which caused it. The psychic knows that the Divine is and affirms its knowledge against all appearances. (31.8.33)

(To be continued)

SAHANA

(At the Feet of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo,
translated by Nirodbaran from the original Bengali)

What Sri Aurobindo represents in the world's history is not a teaching, not even a revelation; it is a decisive action direct from the Supreme.

14 February 1961

The Mother

(Words of the Mother – I, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 13, p. 4)

SHRADDHAVAN — A TRUE CHILD OF THE MOTHER

Shraddhavan was a sadhika who had consecrated all of herself, what she was, and she had — work, life and soul — at the feet of the Mother. She was a true child of the Mother.

Her human mother was Winnie, a teacher of comparative religions, and her father Frederick Walter Robinson, was a vicar of a protestant church. The girl-child who was born to this couple on 4th June 1942 was named by them Anne Margaret Robinson. After 30 years, in June 1972 the Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram gave her the Sanskrit name, “Shraddhavan” which means, ‘One who has faith in the higher being’. Once when I asked her why the Mother gave her a name which is meant for a gentleman, she replied saying the Mother does not give names to someone’s external personality but to the inner virtues or the soul qualities that the person may represent. Shraddhavan studied English and Literature at Bristol University. She also studied Library Science there. From her teens she became a rationalist, materialist and an anarchist. She was enthusiastic to do something meaningful. Once she was advised by a well-wisher to meet great men, whereas she was of the opinion that there were no great men in this world anymore. By the time she was 27 she felt that she had already reached to the lowermost state of consciousness in her life as she expressed it in one of her talks. But then there happened an unexpected opening. She went to listen to a German speaker named Jobst Muehling in London on a Sunday afternoon. She didn’t know about whom this speaker was talking as she had missed the initial part of the talk because she was a bit late at the meeting. She recounts her experience of that meeting and said later, “I do not remember his words but remember the experience. It was as if a room inside my head had opened, as if all the doors had opened; everything fitted together and there was a way forward! At the end of the talk, I rushed up to the man and asked whom he had been talking about. It was Sri Aurobindo. I had never heard of him.” Later she collected some of his books though not many were available there and then and read all of them and got immersed. In her words, “I soaked it all up. It was the Water of Life.”

After that it became the purpose of her life and remained in the forefront and dominated all her activities in life. All the inner and outer, seen and unseen circumstances, inspirations and resources flowed to her disposal. She could get enough strength to face all challenges in life and to master them. All these made her life valuable to herself as well as to the society and to humanity. Then she heard more and more about Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, the Mother and Auroville and wanted to visit. Although she visited many Asian countries including India, Australia and Africa her visit to Pondicherry this time was different. She arrived there in 1970 and was received by Sri M. P. Pandit who arranged everything and

fixed an appointment with the Mother. She went together with the chief architect of Auroville, Roger Anger and met the Mother. The Mother gave her permission to be a teacher in the first school to be opened in Auroville. Though born to a teacher family she was not interested in being a teacher. Having full confidence and trust in the Mother who would certainly consider the well-being of the individual and the entire world and advise accordingly, Shraddhavan accepted her advice to be a teacher gladly and sincerely. She was accommodated in Tibetan Boarding House. So she would travel to Auroville everyday in the morning and after her day's work at Matrimandir and in the School she would return to Pondicherry and join a translators' group who were working on the publication of the *Collected Works of the Mother* (CWM) at the time. This she would continue for the first six years. Then she moved to Certitude Community in Auroville.

Shraddhavan with her partner Helmut moved to Grace Community in Auroville which he was developing at that time and lived there till the last months of her life. Her meetings with the sadhaks of Sri Aurobindo Ashram like Nirodbaran, Amal Kiran, Manoj Das, Chhote Narayana Sharma, Dr. Nadkarni, Kittu Reddy and many others who blossomed under direct contact with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, grew more and more intimate. She considered Amal Kiran as her teacher.

In the first half of the last decade of the twentieth century a group of interested Aurovilians started reading *Savitri* in a very informal way. The then Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, Suresh Dey, was also a part of this group. One of the regular members once suggested that there should be a place in Auroville where all the materials associated with *Savitri* could be collected, a place that would breathe the atmosphere of *Savitri*. Shraddhavan was inspired by this. She put all her energies into this project of Savitri Bhavan and was trying to manifest this wonderful idea. She got engaged in this work with her body, heart, mind and soul till she breathed her last. The disciple and scribe of Sri Aurobindo, Nirodbaran laid the foundation stone of the first building of the Savitri Bhavan in 1995. Donations and grants came flowing into the project over time. Shraddhavan and Helmut both contributed a considerable amount of their personal funds and their inheritances to this project for its continuation and completion at different times. It is yet to be completed though it has already an exhibition hall, an auditorium, a library, a researcher's hostel, a large garden and a nursery, and auxiliary facilities. A life-size statue of Sri Aurobindo, similar to the ones that have been installed in the Indian Parliament and at UNESCO building in Paris, was installed by the then Chairman of Auroville Foundation Dr. Karan Singh at the main entrance of Savitri Bhavan on 21st February 2008. This is a gift to Auroville by the Government of India on Auroville's 40th Birth Anniversary.

The mission of Savitri Bhavan being the manifestation of the spiritual aspects of Auroville through education as envisioned by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, Shraddhavan conducted weekly study classes on various works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, mainly *Savitri* and *The Life Divine*. A journal titled *Invocation* was being

published with the *Savitri* study notes. She was the editor of this journal. Later a series of volumes titled *The English of Savitri*, a sentence by sentence explanation of *Savitri*, was published. This series is being appreciated by people around the world and is being translated into Gujarati. 11 volumes in this series have already been published. The 12th and the last volume of this series is being published this year of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Sri Aurobindo. With this work the entire *Savitri* is covered. Every typical and difficult word and mystical meaning in *Savitri* has been explained by her in this series. Everyone from a beginner to a scholar finds help in understanding *Savitri* better with this series. Shraddhavan felt this work to be her lifetime work and she was pouring her energy and time into its completion. It seems as if she lived with her body till this work was completed. At least two other valuable works of her should be mentioned here. The book, *First Major Spiritual Experience of Sri Aurobindo* was published in July 2022, just a few days before she left her body. This is the transcription of her talk she presented in 2007. The other one is the book, *An Introduction to Savitri* in which Shraddhavan has briefly summarised all the 48 cantos of *Savitri*. She has put together the lines from *Savitri* in prose form without any interpretations. This book was published just a year ago. It is quite helpful to understand *Savitri* as a whole. This book has already been translated into German and Tamil.

Huta played an instrumental role as an artist. Under the direct guidance of the Mother, she produced 472 paintings to express the inner meaning of many passages from *Savitri*. With full trust in Shraddhavan she offered all those original paintings for careful storage and regular exhibition at Savitri Bhavan. They are now stored under appropriate environmental conditions, and high-quality copies almost exactly like the original paintings are being exhibited in the Picture Gallery of Savitri Bhavan throughout the year. The Overman Foundation had honoured Shraddhavan with the ‘Auro-Ratna’ award in 2012 and Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, Kolkata with ‘Sri Aurobindo Puraskar’ in 2016. Shraddhavan herself was a poet too. She published her poems in a book, *Stars in the Soup*.

The project of ‘*Savitri* Around the World’ was the brainchild of Shraddhavan manifested in collaboration with Auroville International and Savitri Bhavan, celebrating the Golden Jubilee of Auroville’s manifestation held in February 2018. This was broadcast again on the Centenary of the Mother’s final arrival in Pondicherry on 24 April 1920, remembering the Mother’s words: “*Savitri* is a mantra for the transformation of the World.” Recorded readings by 495 individuals representing 28 Indian states and 69 countries around the globe have been assembled to create a continuous reading (Parayan) of Sri Aurobindo’s epic *Savitri — a Legend and a Symbol*, which the Mother has called “The Supreme Revelation of Sri Aurobindo’s Vision”, starting at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, where the poem was composed from 1916 to 1950, moving around India and then travelling westward with the sun through Central and Western Asia, Africa, Europe, North, South and

Central America, Oceania, East and South East Asia before returning to India and ending in Auroville, the City of Dawn. The corresponding *Savitri* text as well as information about each reader have been added in the form of subtitles. The final product in three parts, lasting 35 hours, was live-streamed, recorded and is now permanently available on YouTube so that it can be viewed all around the world.

All this was possible with the inspiration, creativity and leadership of Shradhdhavan. It is another unique contribution to the world. However, it is always to be remembered that the original knowledge, inspiration and wisdom are of, from and for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to whom she was surrendered with full faith and trust. She was only the catalyst introducing *Savitri* which she did quite successfully in Auroville as well as in the world.

Towards the second half of 2021 she was gradually withdrawing from her external and administrative responsibilities. Her health began deteriorating by the beginning of 2022. She was advised and treated by Dr. Alok Pandey whom she trusted the most. A time came when she needed 24-hour care and attendance, then she was admitted to ‘Desirée’, a care home for seniors of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. She felt happy and satisfied with the friendly and healthy and spiritual environment there. Shradhdhavan came to the environment of Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1970 at the age of 28. Interestingly, she left her body after 52 years from the same air charged with the Presence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on 19th July 2022 with all their Blessings for her onward journey in the intangible worlds. It cannot be considered as an accident. She came to a place where she started living the purpose of her life and consecrated herself fully for that and left for her original abode from the same place after accomplishing the mandate for which she took this human birth. Initiation and completion of that valuable aim was accomplished by the Supreme Mother who did everything for her from behind the screen. Shradhdhavan left her material sheath with gratitude in her heart.

RAMA NARAYANA
(AUROVILLE)

Sri Aurobindo has brought to the world the assurance of a divine future.

The Mother

(Words of the Mother – I, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 13, p. 4)

“LIFE OF PREPARATION AT BARODA” — SRI AUROBINDO, THE PERFECT GENTLEMAN

(Part 32)

Section 3: A QUIET AND HUMBLE DISPOSITION

(Continued from the issue of December 2022)

Sri Aurobindo emphasised the inner life of a person, not the outer achievements. He was not for any publicity or propaganda about himself. A note by the editors of the *Collected Works of Sri Aurobindo* states that Sri Aurobindo “rarely wrote about himself on his own initiative.”¹ Furthermore, he discouraged his disciples from writing his biography. During the late 1920s Dilip Kumar Roy wrote *Among the Great* which comprised accounts of his meetings with and excerpts from his correspondence with five eminent personalities — Romain Rolland, Mahatma Gandhi, Bertrand Russell, Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. When the section of the manuscript of the book dealing with Sri Aurobindo’s life was submitted to him he replied to Dilip:

I do not know where you got the facts in your account of my life; but after starting to correct it I had to give up the attempt in despair. It is chock-full of errors and inaccuracies: this cannot be published. . . . The best will be to omit all account or narrative and say — at not too much length, I would suggest — what you think it necessary to say about me.²

Dilip, however was unwilling to “omit all account or narrative” prompting Sri Aurobindo to write:

I see that you have persisted in giving a biography — is it really necessary or useful? The attempt is bound to be a failure, because neither you nor anyone else knows anything at all of my life; it has not been on the surface for man to see.³

Due to the insistence of the disciple coupled with the fact that there were several errors in the manuscript, Sri Aurobindo finally agreed, in June 1930, to write a brief outward “Life Sketch” with the understanding that his name could not be put as the author. He wrote:

1. *CWSA*, Vol. 35, p. 849.

2. *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, p. 11.

3. *Ibid.*

No, certainly not [*on the question whether the “Life Sketch” could be published over Sri Aurobindo’s signature*]. If you gave my name, it would be as if I were advertising myself in your book. I did not care to have anything of the kind written, as I told you, because I do not think these things are of any importance. I merely wrote, in the end, a brief summary of the most outward facts, nothing inward or personal, because I have seen that many legends and distortions are afloat, and this will at least put things in the straight line. If you like, you can mention that it is a brief statement of the principal facts of Sri Aurobindo’s public life from an authoritative source.

Necessarily I have mentioned only salient facts, leaving out all mere details. As for an *estimate* of myself I have given none. In my view, a man’s value does not depend on what he learns or his position or fame or what he does, but on what he is and inwardly becomes, and of that I have said nothing. I do not want to alter what I have written. If you like you can put a note of your own to the “occidental education” stating that it included Greek and Latin and two or three modern languages, but I do not myself see the necessity of it or the importance.⁴

About the “Life Sketch” — of which a very large part covered the period of his life prior to his permanent residence in Pondicherry — he told a disciple:

This idea of a “Life” going into details and personalities is itself an error. I wrote the brief life given to Dilip as containing all that I wanted to be said about me for the present. The general public can know about my philosophy and Yoga and general character of my work, it has no claim to know anything about the personal side of my life or of that of the Asram either.⁵

In 1937, Arya Publishing House proposed bringing out the “Life Sketch” as a pamphlet and sought Sri Aurobindo’s consent. He responded with a lukewarm, “Very Well.”⁶

Dilip Kumar Roy observed that “few people who have known him will disagree with my estimate that he was essentially a man of deep reserve, a denizen of the deeps.”⁷

In 1933, A. B. Purani was approached to authenticate a Marathi biography of Sri Aurobindo by an author of several Marathi books. He requested Sri Aurobindo to extend his cooperation. Sri Aurobindo replied: “I am not interested in my own biography.” Purani then clarified, “Is there any reply to be sent to this letter?”

4. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

5. *Ibid.*, Vol. 35, p. 6.

6. *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, p. 558.

7. Dilip Kumar Roy, *Sri Aurobindo Came to Me*, 5th Ed., 2004, p. 171.

Sri Aurobindo answered: “I don’t think a reply is necessary. If I am to be murdered in cold print, it had better be done without my disciples becoming abettors of the crime.”⁸

In another instance a publisher approached a disciple and offered him very good terms to write a biography of Sri Aurobindo. The disciple told Sri Aurobindo, “If I decline I am sure they will just get it done by someone else.” Sri Aurobindo replied:

There is no one who can write my biography nor is this the time to do it, supposing it has to be done at all. If the outward facts of the life are meant, anybody can do that and it has no importance — the best thing is to have some outsider to do that mess, if mess there must be.⁹

There were several biographies with inaccuracies and misrepresentation of his ideas. In 1934 Sri Aurobindo explained his position about this to a disciple:

If I tolerate a little writing about myself, it is only to have a sufficient counterweight in that amorphous chaos, the public mind, to balance the hostility that is always aroused by the presence of a new dynamic Truth in this world of ignorance. But the utility ends there and too much advertisement would defeat that object. I am perfectly “rational”, I assure you, in my methods and I do not proceed merely on any personal dislike of fame. If and so far as publicity serves the Truth, I am quite ready to tolerate it; but I do not find publicity for its own sake desirable.¹⁰

Sri Aurobindo added:

. . . I prefer to do solid work and leave that [*bookmaking*] to others. You may say that I can write a solid thing in philosophy and let it be bookmade. But even the solid tends to look shoddy in such surroundings. And besides my solid work at present is not philosophy but something less wordy and more to the point. If that work gets done, then it will propagate itself so far as propagation is necessary — if it were not to get done, propagation would be useless.¹¹

Neither a biographer nor a historian can ever fully comprehend a spiritual man’s life, let alone Sri Aurobindo’s. In a letter to a disciple Sri Aurobindo remarked:

8. *CWSA*, Vol. 35, pp. 5-6.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

First of all what matters in a spiritual man's life is not what he did or what he was outside to the view of the men of his time (that is what historicity or biography comes to, does it not?) but what he was and did within; it is only that that gives any value to his outer life at all. It is the inner life that gives to the outer any power it may have, and the inner life of a spiritual man is something vast and full and, at least in the great figures, so crowded and teeming with significant things that no biographer or historian could ever hope to seize it all or tell it. Whatever is significant in the outward life is so because it is a symbol of what has been realised within himself and one may go on and say that the inner life also is only significant as an expression, a living representation of the movement of the Divinity behind it.¹²

Sri Aurobindo has told a disciple, “I have always lived within”.¹³ Mankind will need to rise to far higher levels of consciousness to get a meaningful idea about the significance of Sri Aurobindo's life. His works like *Savitri*, *The Life Divine* and others are an expression not only of his experiences and realisations but also his consciousness that has been framed within the limitations of a language. “The *Life Divine* is not philosophy but fact. It contains what I have realised and seen,”¹⁴ Sri Aurobindo once said. Sri Aurobindo has also told his disciples:

To write my life is impossible. The idea is wrong. Who can write it? In case of poets, philosophers and Yogis, it is no use attempting their biography, because they don't live in their external life. Their real life is the inner life, and how can anyone else know that life? It is different with men of action: say, Caesar and Napoleon — men who develop themselves through action. Even in their case it would be best if they wrote the biographies themselves.¹⁵

Besides being a Yogi, Sri Aurobindo, like Napoleon and Caesar, was also a man of action although in a more quiet and subtle way. Since Sri Aurobindo's inner life is beyond the realms of human conception and imagination let us briefly state a few of his actions that are known to us. Sri Aurobindo was the first person to publicly declare India's right for complete independence, an unthinkable proposition at a time when the British Empire was all-powerful and people thought independence “as unpractical and impossible, an almost insane chimera.”¹⁶ He, along with Tilak, was the most forceful and prominent Nationalist leader who was developing the political consciousness of the nation through his speeches, actions, writings and

12. *Ibid.*, Vol. 28, p. 479.

13. *Ibid.*, Vol. 35, p. 51.

14. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 234.

15. V. Chidanandam, ‘Sri Aurobindo at Evening Talk’, *Mother India*, December 1969, p. 686.

16. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 47.

awakening his countrymen to their rich spiritual heritage. “You ought to have seen what this Bengal was before the Swadeshi movement to understand what it has accomplished,”¹⁷ he once remarked. About the movement he stated elsewhere, “It was the soul of the race that woke up throwing up very fine personalities.”¹⁸ As one of the prime architects of the Swadeshi movement, a movement far ahead of its time, Sri Aurobindo had a direct influence on India gaining her independence. A correspondence with Sri Aurobindo reads:

When I read the speeches you delivered before 1910, it seems to me as if Gandhi had almost copied everything from that — Swaraj, Samiti, Non-cooperation, and so on. If not outwardly he must have received these things from you in an occult way.

The whole of Gandhi’s affair is simply our passive resistance movement given an ethical instead of a political form, applied with a rigid thoroughness which human nature except in a minority cannot bear for long and given too a twist which seems to me to make it harmful to the sane balance and many-sided plasticity necessary for national life.¹⁹

In 1936 Sri Aurobindo commented about the contemporary political leaders: “All the present Congress lot seem to be men who live in ideas only, mostly secondhand, borrowed from Europe (Socialism, Communism etc.), borrowed from Gandhi, borrowed from tradition or borrowed from anywhere . . .”²⁰

Commenting about Sri Aurobindo as a man of action the Mother told a disciple:

They have found some letters — some old letters — from Sri Aurobindo to Barin and the lawyer — extraordinary!²¹ They are incredible. They give the measure of Sri Aurobindo as a man of action. Even in 1920, he intended to undertake an action. To organise centres all over India, the world, oh! . . . a plan! . . . And that was before the liberation of the country!

He says that he has completely withdrawn to find his yoga, but once he had found it, he is going to start his action. . . .²²

17. Anilbaran Roy, ‘Conversations with Sri Aurobindo’, *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, Thirty-fourth Number, p. 29.

18. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 561.

19. *CWSA*, Vol. 35, p. 18.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

21. C. R. Das, Sri Aurobindo’s lawyer in the Alipore bomb case. There are three letters; one dated November 18, 1922, to C. R. Das, and the two others to Barin, Sri Aurobindo’s younger brother, dated November 18, 1922 and December 1, 1922.

22. Mother’s conversation with a disciple on 20 October 1971.

At certain critical moments in world history Sri Aurobindo had silently used his spiritual force to change or influence world events. Referring to his post-political life, Sri Aurobindo has noted in the third person:

In his retirement Sri Aurobindo kept a close watch on all that was happening in the world and in India and actively intervened whenever necessary, but solely with a spiritual force and silent spiritual action . . .²³

Earlier in 1935 he told a disciple:

My life has been a battle from its early years and is still a battle, — the fact that I wage it now from a room upstairs and by spiritual means as well as others that are external makes no difference to its character. But of course as we have not been shouting about these things, it is natural, I suppose, for the sadhaks to think I am living in an august, glamorous, lotus-eating dreamland where no hard facts of life or nature present themselves. But what an illusion, all the same!²⁴

And during the pivotal Second World War, Sri Aurobindo wrote in the third person:

Inwardly, he put his spiritual force behind the Allies from the moment of Dunkirk when everybody was expecting the immediate fall of England and the definite triumph of Hitler, and he had the satisfaction of seeing the rush of German victory almost immediately arrested and the tide of war begin to turn in the opposite direction. This he did, because he saw that behind Hitler and Nazism were dark Asuric forces and that their success would mean the enslavement of mankind to the tyranny of evil, and a set-back to the course of evolution and especially to the spiritual evolution of mankind . . .²⁵

The above statement was so unobtrusive that it has been unnoticed by historians. In another instance Sri Aurobindo wrote to a disciple:

You kindly hint to me that I have failed to get anything by works? How do you know? I have not written the history of my sadhana — if I had, you would have seen that if I had not made action and work one of my chief means of realisation — well, there would have been no sadhana and no realisation except that, perhaps, of Nirvana.²⁶

23. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 65.

24. *Ibid.*, Vol. 35, p. 44.

25. *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, p. 66.

26. *Ibid.*, Vol. 35, p. 747.

Unlike the Sannyasin who renounces life, Sri Aurobindo emphasised work and action. He once disclosed:

A calm or silence which can support or produce action — that I know and that is what I have had — the proof is that out of an absolute silence of the mind I edited the *Bande Mataram* for four months and wrote 6 ½ volumes of the *Arya*, not to speak of all the letters and messages etc. etc. I have written since. If you say that writing is not an action or motion but only something that seems like it, a jugglery of the consciousness, — well, still out of that calm and silence I conducted a pretty strenuous political activity and have also taken my share in keeping up an Asram which has at least an appearance to the physical senses of being solid and material! If you deny that these things are material or solid (which of course metaphysically you can), then you land yourself plump into Shankara’s illusionism, and there I will leave you.²⁷

Whilst on the subject of Sri Aurobindo’s biography the Mother had a very interesting conversation with a disciple, eleven years after he left his body. She spoke of writing a biography on Sri Aurobindo, at an appropriate time, which would “be very beautiful in its simplicity”:

... My book, of course, would be: *What I have known of Sri Aurobindo* — and on his supreme level. *What I have known of Sri Aurobindo* is ... what I have been able to perceive of the Avatar. What he represents. That’s how I see him. So, *what I have known of Sri Aurobindo*, expressed ‘spontaneously,’ with a minimum of external events, the very minimum, but with all the experiences of our meetings: at that time, this opened that; at that moment, I realised this or saw that or felt something else ... ; and then I was able to do such and such — and all of it was Sri Aurobindo.

... It would be very simple: no plan of ideas, no plan of development, nothing; simply a story.

For example, the importance of the departure [in 1915, when Mother left Pondicherry for France and later Japan]: how he was present the whole time I was away; how he guided my entire life in Japan; how ... Of course, it would be seen in the mirror of my own experience, but it would be Sri Aurobindo — not me, not my reactions: him; but through my experience because that’s all I can speak of.

There would be interesting things even for. ...

But I have two very serious objections. One, it would be a major occult revelation (there would be a lot of occultism — what people term ‘miracles’

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 346-47.

or things of that nature), a major revelation. I hesitate to do that because I don't think it's time yet. Mainly that. And then, in spite of everything, it would inevitably be far too personal, even if it weren't written along personal lines — far too personal. And now isn't the time for that. . . .

Here, just to give you an example: when I first began to work (not with Théon personally but with an acquaintance of his in France, a boy [Themanlys] who was a friend of my brother), well, I had a series of visions (I knew nothing about India, mind you, nothing, just as most Europeans know nothing about it: “a country full of people with certain customs and religions, a confused and hazy history, where a lot of ‘extraordinary things’ are said to have happened.” I knew nothing.) Well, in several of these visions I saw Sri Aurobindo just as he looked physically, but glorified; that is, the same man I would see on my first visit, almost thin, with that golden-bronze hue and rather sharp profile, an unruly beard and long hair, dressed in a dhoti with one end of it thrown over his shoulder, arms and chest bare, and bare feet. At the time I thought it was “vision attire”! I mean I really knew nothing about India; I had never seen Indians dressed in the Indian way.

Well, I saw him. I experienced what were at once symbolic visions and spiritual *facts*: absolutely decisive spiritual experiences and facts of meeting and having a united perception of the Work to be accomplished. And in these visions I did something I had never done physically: I prostrated before him in the Hindu manner. All this without any comprehension in the little brain (I mean I really didn't know what I was doing or how I was doing it — nothing at all). I did it, and at the same time the outer being was asking, “What is all this?!”

I wrote the vision down (or perhaps that was later on) but I never spoke of it to anyone (one doesn't talk about such things, naturally). But my impression was that it was premonitory, that one day something like it would happen. And it remained *in the background of the consciousness*, not active, but constantly present. . . .

Then when Richard came here he met Sri Aurobindo (he was haunted by the idea of meeting the “Master,” the Guru, the “Great Teacher”). Sri Aurobindo was in hiding, seeing no one, but when Richard insisted, he met him, and Richard returned with a photograph. It was one of those early photos, with nothing in it. It was empty, the remnants of the political man, not at all resembling what I had seen — I didn't recognise him. “It's strange,” I said to myself, “that's not it” (for I saw only his external appearance, there was no inner contact). But still, I was curious to meet him. At any rate, I can't say that when I saw this photograph I felt, “He's the one!” Not at all. He impressed me as being a very interesting man, but no more.

I came here. . . . But something in me wanted to meet Sri Aurobindo all alone the first time. Richard went to him in the morning and I had an

appointment for the afternoon. He was living in the house that's now part of the second dormitory, the old *Guest House* [Rue François Martin]. I climbed up the stairway and he was standing there, waiting for me at the top of the stairs. . . . *exactly* my vision! Dressed the same way, in the same position, in profile, his head held high. He turned his head towards me . . . and I saw in his eyes that it was He. The two things clicked (*gesture of instantaneous shock*), the inner experience immediately became one with the outer experience and there was a fusion — the decisive shock.

But this was merely the beginning of my vision. Only after a series of experiences — a ten months' sojourn in Pondicherry, five years of separation, then the return to Pondicherry and the meeting in the same house and in the same way — did the *end* of the vision occur. . . . I was standing just beside him. My head wasn't exactly on his shoulder, but where his shoulder was (I don't know how to explain it — physically there was hardly any contact). We were standing side by side like that, gazing out through the open window, and then *together*, at exactly the same moment, we felt, “Now the Realisation will be accomplished.” That the seal was set and the Realisation would be accomplished. I felt the Thing descending massively within me, with the same certainty I had felt in my vision. From that moment on there was nothing to say — no words, nothing. We knew it was *That*.

But between these two meetings he participated in a whole series of experiences, experiences of gradually growing awareness. This is partly noted in *Prayers and Meditations* (I have cut out all the personal segments). But there was one experience I didn't speak of there (that is, I didn't describe it, I put only the conclusion) — the experience where I say “Since the man refused I was offering participation in the universal work and the new creation and the man didn't want it, he refused, and so I now offer it to God. . . .” [Mother is probably alluding to this passage in *Prayers and Meditations* (September 3, 1919): ‘Since the man refused the meal I had prepared with so much love and care, I invoke the God to take it.’]

This can all be narrated in a very simple way; these things are not metaphysical. It involves occultism, of course, but it's utterly concrete and simple: things a child could understand.

And these are the real milestones of the whole Story.

I feel it will be told one day. But first of all, this (*Mother touches her body*) must be sufficiently changed. Then the story will take on its full value. . . .

. . . Sri Aurobindo has come to tell the world that man is not the final creation, that there is another creation; and he said this not because he knew it but because he felt it. And he began to do it. And that's all.

It needn't be long. . . .

And mind you, it can be very beautiful in its simplicity, a beauty sorrowful

people can feel, people who are tired of life, people whose heads are sick of all these arguments and dogmas — people who are tired of thinking too many great thoughts.

And I am the first among them! Nothing tires me more than philosophers.²⁸

King’s College, Cambridge keeps a record of the academic work and a career description of its alumni. Their Annual Report of 1951 on Sri Aurobindo was exceedingly eulogistic. It concluded with the sentence: “Some would say that his position, among the great men produced by the new India of this century, is equalled only by that of Gandhi and Tagore.”²⁹

However, the Mother has given us some context of Sri Aurobindo’s greatness when she clarified to a disciple who had raised a question on Gandhi:

In the effort of humanity to reach the Truth and manifest it, all those who made a discovery, however small it may be, have a place, and Gandhi is one of them.

But the great mistake has always been to oppose these partial discoveries instead of unifying them in a supreme harmony. That is why humanity is still groping in the dark.

Sri Aurobindo has come to reveal that this supreme harmony exists and to show us the way to discover it.³⁰

And referring to an article in the *Grande Revue*, a literary monthly published in France until 1939, the Mother told a disciple:

... I read the article you mention. I found it rather dull, but apart from that not too bad. But the Mukerjee quoted there must have lived for many years outside India (in America, I believe) and has become completely westernised; otherwise he would not give Gandhi and Tagore as the two most popular figures *in India*. On the contrary it is outside India that they are most popular; and for foreigners these two men seem to be the only ones who represent Indian genius. This is very far from the truth, and if they are so well known in Western countries, it is probably because their stature does not go beyond the understanding of the Western mind.

India has far greater geniuses than these and in the most varied fields, scientific, literary, philosophic, spiritual. It is true that the young people from Shantiniketan come out refined, but without any force or energy for realisation. As for Gandhi’s young people, they may have more energy and power of

28. Mother’s conversation with a disciple on 20 December 1961.

29. ‘King’s College, Cambridge, on Sri Aurobindo’, *Mother India*, August 1988, p. 504.

30. *CWM*, Vol. 13, 2nd Ed., p. 23.

action, but they are imprisoned within the four walls of a few narrow ideas and a limited mind.

I repeat, there is better, far better in India, but this India does not care for international glory.³¹

Once, the Mother had said in passing that most people who called Sri Aurobindo great based their estimate on data which could not reveal the moral core of his greatness. She added: “That is why a true vision of what is the essence of greatness is indispensable, especially to the pilgrims of the Spirit”.³² And when a disciple wondered, “It is really strange that He is not yet recognised, at least as a supreme creator, a pure artist, a poet *par excellence*!”, the Mother replied:

Who can understand Sri Aurobindo? He is as vast as the universe and his teaching is infinite . . .³³

In a talk Nirodbaran asserted:

I consider it a strangely significant fact that while almost all the Avatars had been recognised in their lifetime, the one Supreme Avatar has come and gone without our knowing him as Avatar. There is a verse in *Savitri*: “Heaven’s greatness came, but was too great to stay.” Generally, men recognise him at most as a Yogi, as a Rishi, that’s all, not more than that. The gross humanity is sleeping in its ignorance. God knows how long it will sleep like Kumbhakarna and after how long this humanity will awake and bemoan its fateful ignorance. But he doesn’t care. He has come, he has gone, leaving a blazing trail for those who have eyes to see. But a day will surely come. . . . In fact, it is coming. More and more people, as you see, are recognising him as an Avatar — but about his being the Supramental Avatar, I suppose it will take some more time yet.³⁴

Once, a disciple submitted an article for his approval. Sri Aurobindo replied:

Do you really think it necessary or advisable to publish an exegesis of this kind? . . . What you write about my books would be considered as extravagant by most readers. Also we do not usually encourage sadhaks of the Asram to write about us as divine, though one or another may have done it — there is a certain reticence in this matter which is desirable in writing for the general public.³⁵

31. *Ibid.*, Vol. 16, 2nd Ed., pp. 5-6.

32. Dilip Kumar Roy, *Sri Aurobindo Came to Me*, 5th Ed., 2004, p. 329.

33. *CWM*, Vol. 12, 2nd Ed., p. 397.

34. *Talks by Nirodbaran*, edited by Sunayana and Maurice, 2018, pp. 9-10.

35. *CWSA*, Vol. 35, p. 433.

And in a section of a biography where a writer dwelt at length on the Mother, Sri Aurobindo remarked:

Section V of this Chapter is better omitted. Up till now Sri Aurobindo has prohibited any public propaganda of the idea of his personal divinity and that of the Mother or of certain aspects of the Asram life; these things have been kept private for the Asram itself, and its inmates and the disciples . . .³⁶

Sri Aurobindo rarely wrote anything autobiographical of his own volition. Most of the notes were to correct statements made by others or to illustrate a point to his disciples. In 1931 Sri Aurobindo wrote: “I am afraid X is asking from me a thing psychologically impossible. You know that I have forbidden myself to write anything for publication for some time past and some time to come — I am self-debarred from press, platform and public.”³⁷ And in 1936 he wrote: “As for past writings, I never take the initiative for publication in papers. Y, X or Z sometimes ask for leave to publish this or that somewhere where it is asked for and I consent — that is all.”³⁸ The same year he wrote:

The initiative is always X and I do not send anything myself or intervene in his action, but he takes the sanction from me.

All that you need to write to Delhi is that Sri Aurobindo is not writing articles for the papers; the things that appear from time to time are old writings of his not yet published in book form and sent to the papers at their request with his sanction.³⁹

Even the *Arya* — “a Review of pure philosophy” which ran from 1914 to 1921 and was founded on his “personal realisation” — was written, Sri Aurobindo explained: “First, because Richard proposed to me to cooperate in a philosophical review — and as my theory was that a Yogi ought to be able to turn his hand to anything, I could not very well refuse . . .”⁴⁰

In 1931 a “Golden Book” of Tagore was being compiled as a tribute to Tagore on his 70th birthday. This privately produced book, a collection of Tagore’s important writings, was brought out on the suggestion of Nobel Laureate Romain Rolland and sponsored by Gandhi, Albert Einstein, Kostas Palamas, and Rolland himself. The book goes to show how highly Tagore was regarded the world-over. Dilip Kumar Roy narrates something relating to the book:

36. *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, p. 103.

37. *Ibid.*, Vol. 35, p. 67.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

I have often wondered why he spent so much of his precious time to help us even in our poetic experimentations when much more seemingly important things were crying for his attention in vain! To quote a random instance: when the Golden Book of Tagore was being compiled, Sri Pramatha Choudhuri wrote to me urgent letters to induce Gurudev to contribute something. But Gurudev wrote back to me (in 1931):

“I am afraid Pramatha Choudhuri is asking from me a thing psychologically impossible. You know that I have forbidden myself to write anything for publication for some time past and some time to come. I am self-debarred from the press, platform and public. Even if it were otherwise, it would be impossible, under present circumstances, to write at a week’s notice. You will present him my excuses in your best and most tactful manner.”

But Sri Pramatha Choudhuri would not listen and importuned again: “Tagore’s Golden Book will be incomplete without Sri Aurobindo’s tribute. Even a message of two lines or a couplet coming from him will be looked upon as a boon of his Grace” — etc.

But Sri Aurobindo’s Grace was not like Caesar’s, amenable to flattery.

“I take Pramatha Choudhuri’s remark — that Tagore’s Golden Book will be incomplete without my contribution — as a complimentary hyperbole. The Golden book will be as golden and Tagore’s work and fame as solid without any lubrication from me to gild the one or buttress the other.”

But . . . he not only went on encouraging the poems of such as we but went on actually correcting our English verses — and with what meticulous pains! I myself have written more than six hundred pages of English verse and produced at least two thousand pages in Bengali, and he not only found time to read *all* these carefully but to comment on most of them as well as throw out suggestions for improvement.⁴¹

In 1936 Swami Sambuddhananda wrote to Sri Aurobindo: “In connection with the celebration of the Birth Centenary of Sri Ramakrishna, a Parliament of Religions will be held in Calcutta from the 1st to 7th March, 1937. It is the unanimous and seriously considered view of the organisers that nobody in India today is in a more appropriate position than you are to direct the proceedings of the International Assembly. We shall be highly obliged if you would kindly consent to preside over the session of the Parliament.” Sri Aurobindo responded:

Write to him on my behalf that I regret I am unable to accept his invitation as I have adopted a rule of life which prevents me from appearing in public or taking any personal part in public activities. This rule is still valid for me and I am unable to depart from it.

41. Dilip Kumar Roy, *Sri Aurobindo Came to Me*, 5th Ed., 2004, pp. 126-27.

Or perhaps you [*Sri Aurobindo's secretary*] can type the answer as from me and I will sign it.⁴²

Sri Aurobindo's indifference to recognition also included his unwillingness to accept any awards or honours. However, in 1948, he made an exception and accepted an award from Andhra University. The acceptance of the award could be considered as a great honour to Andhra University, yet Sri Aurobindo courteously wrote to the University:

I am not a Sannyasi and my Yoga does not turn away from life; but still I have always followed the rule of not accepting titles, honours or distinctions from any Government or public institution and have rejected or stood back from even the highest when offered to me. But after long consideration I have felt that the distinction which the Andhra University proposes to confer upon me is not of the same character and need not fall within this rule. . . . I authorise you therefore to consider my name for this award and if the University confirms its choice of me, my acceptance of your National Prize. One difficulty remains; you know perhaps that I have been living in entire retirement, appearing in public only on the occasion of the four Darshans on which I receive the inmates of my Ashram and visitors from all parts of India. Otherwise I do not go out of the rooms in which I live and still less ever leave the Ashram or Pondicherry. This makes it impossible for me to go to Waltair to receive the distinction conferred upon me. I would have therefore to ask for an exception to be made in this matter in my case.⁴³

When the Chancellor of the Andhra University, who was also the Governor of Madras, confirmed the award to Sri Aurobindo, he graciously replied to him:

I have received with much gratification your offer of this distinction bestowed on me by your University and I am glad to intimate to you my acceptance. I understand from what you say about Darshan that you will personally come to Pondicherry for this purpose and I look forward with much pleasure to seeing and meeting you.⁴⁴

Speaking of awards, Sri Aurobindo was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1950. Curiously, a letter proposing Sri Aurobindo's name for the 1950 Nobel Prize in Literature was sent in 1949 by Gabriela Mistral, the 1945 Nobel laureate in

42. *CWSA*, Vol. 35, p. 36.

43. *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, pp. 504-05.

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 505-06.

Literature, and seconded by Pearl S. Buck, the 1938 Nobel laureate in Literature.⁴⁵ A statement supporting Sri Aurobindo's nomination was signed by 36 leading citizens and intellectuals of India representing many regions of India which included several Governors, Central ministers, Chief Ministers, Academicians (of whom 16 held the post of either a Chancellor or a Vice-Chancellor of one of the reputed Universities in India), Maharajas and others. However, instead of Literature, Sri Aurobindo was nominated for the 1950 Nobel Peace Prize.

Gabriela Mistral has said: “Sri Aurobindo opened the way to my religious consecration I have derived considerable solace and enlightenment from reading his works.”⁴⁶ She has also referred to Sri Aurobindo as the “highest of mystics” who made use “of his beautifully austere and classical prose to serve as the handmaid of the Spirit.”⁴⁷

Romain Rolland, the 1915 French Nobel laureate in Literature, has said: “Sri Aurobindo [is] the foremost of Indian thinkers, who has realised the most complete synthesis between the genius of the West and of the East.”⁴⁸

Earlier, on the recommendation of British writer and explorer, Sir Francis Younghusband, Sri Aurobindo's name was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1943. About *The Life Divine* Younghusband told Dilip Kumar Roy, “I really do quite genuinely consider it the greatest book which has been produced in my time . . .”⁴⁹

Later in 1948, the famous writer and philosopher Aldous Huxley also made efforts for recommending Sri Aurobindo's name for the Nobel Prize. He told Dilip Kumar Roy that he regarded *The Life Divine* “not merely of the highest importance as regards its content, but remarkably fine as a piece of philosophic and religious literature.”⁵⁰

About the *The Life Divine* Amal Kiran, who was very free and frank with Sri Aurobindo, narrates an amusing incident from his early days in the Ashram:

Once I told the Mother that I found Sri Aurobindo's *Life Divine* not sufficiently logical! She opened wide her eyes — and said: “This is the first time anybody has said such a thing.” As with the first Pranam, she related the incident to Sri Aurobindo: “Look at what he says. . . .” Sri Aurobindo, it seems, just nodded

45. See ‘Nomination Letter for the Nobel Prize for Sri Aurobindo in 1950’, *Mother India*, January 1994, p. 13. The letter has been reproduced on pp. 84-86 of this issue.

46. ‘Tributes to Sri Aurobindo from Celebrities – The London Times Literary Supplement’, *Mother India*, August 1997, p. 615.

47. See Gabriela Mistral, ‘Gabriela Mistral, Chilean Poet and Nobel Prize-Winner, on Sri Aurobindo’, *Mother India*, August 1974, pp. 566-67 (translated from Spanish by Norman C. Dowsett).

48. ‘Tributes to Sri Aurobindo from Celebrities – The London Times Literary Supplement’, *Mother India*, August 1997, pp. 614-15.

49. ‘Sir Francis Younghusband on Sri Aurobindo: A Letter of 1941 and a Book Review of 1942’, *Mother India*, August 1975, p. 623. The letter appears on p. 82 of this issue.

50. ‘Letters from Aldous Huxley and Herbert Read on Sri Aurobindo’, *Mother India*, August 1987, p. 467.

and smiled, as he often used to do. He was not given to being very voluble or demonstrative. The Mother, I am told, would go and tell him something or other quite animatedly and he would do nothing but gaze. Then she, thinking she had not made herself clear, would repeat the matter in other words. Then he would say, “I see.”⁵¹

Sri Aurobindo, however, had told Dilip Kumar Roy that even during his time in Baroda and Bengal he never cared for fame or have his name publicised. He added:

Then again I don’t believe in advertisement except for books etc., and in propaganda except for politics and patent medicines. But for serious work it is a poison. It means either a stunt or a boom — and stunts and booms exhaust the thing they carry on their crest and leave it lifeless and broken high and dry on the shores of nowhere — or it means a movement. A movement in the case of a work like mine means the founding of a school or a sect or some other damned nonsense. It means that hundreds or thousands of useless people join in and corrupt the work or reduce it to a pompous farce from which the Truth that was coming down recedes into secrecy and silence. It is what has happened to the “religions” and is the reason of their failure.⁵²

(To be continued)

GAUTAM MALAKER

51. Amal Kiran & Nirodbaran, *Light and Laughter – Some Talks at Pondicherry*, 3rd Ed., p. 16.

52. CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 71.

The human being is naturally egoistic and ego-centred — all he does, thinks, feels has the stamp of the ego on it and it cannot be otherwise until he learns to make not the ego but the Divine the centre of his existence and thinks, acts, feels only for the Divine — or until he enters into the higher or divine consciousness or the divine consciousness into him — for in the divine consciousness there is no ego.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga – IV, CWSA, Vol. 31, p. 218)

SRI AUROBINDO AND THE NOBEL PRIZE

Dilip Kumar Roy had sent *The Life Divine* to British writer and explorer, Sir Francis Younghusband (1863-1942) for appraisal. Younghusband not only learned immensely from this masterpiece but felt it was the greatest book of his time that too published fortuitously at a time when the world was in a deep crisis. It so deeply impacted him that he recommended Sri Aurobindo for the Nobel Prize in Literature. In a letter dated 17th December, 1941, to Dilip Kumar Roy, he wrote:

Dear Mr. Dilip Roy,

You will be glad to hear that after a very careful study of Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* I have today written to the Royal Swedish Academy recommending him for the Nobel Prize. It so happens that I am a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature so that my recommendation is accepted though that does not mean that the Nobel Prize will be given to him; other recommendations will have to be considered.

I am indeed grateful to you for having sent me the book. I really do quite genuinely consider it the greatest book which has been produced in my time and I have learned some very valuable things from it which I would much like to have known before — all the arguments for rebirth for instance. I am so very happy in the present life I have never troubled much to think of any other. Then all he has said about the different planes of existence has greatly interested me. In my two books *Life in the Stars* and *The Living Universe* I have written much on life on other planets or other stars and on some of the inhabitants being on a higher level of being than we are. But I had not then realised all that I have now learned from *The Life Divine*.

I well remember hearing you sing in Calcutta in March 1937 and often wished I could meet you again. It was a great delight therefore to hear from you. This war has been a terrible catastrophe and we here in London suffered badly. I have been all through it and helped in Air Raid Precautions. But bad as it is the calamity has had one good effect; it has turned men's mind to God. Men realise now the value of religion as they never did before. And *The Life Divine* could not have appeared at a more opportune moment. Some time must elapse before its importance can be appreciated. Then slowly and surely it will make its influence felt.

With very many thanks and every good wish for the New Year, believe me.

Yours very sincerely,

Francis Younghusband¹

1. 'Sir Francis Younghusband on Sri Aurobindo: A Letter of 1941 and a Book Review of 1942', *Mother India*, August 1975, p. 623.

On the proposal of Younghusband the Swedish Academy nominated Sri Aurobindo for the 1943 Nobel Prize in Literature. The Academy registered his profession as philosopher and author. There were 20 persons who were nominated for this prize that year.

A nomination for the Nobel Prize may be submitted by members of academies, university professors, scientists, previous Nobel laureates, members of parliamentary assemblies and others. The names of the nominees and other information about the nominations cannot be revealed until 50 years later.

The famous writer-cum-philosopher Aldous Huxley too discovered that *The Life Divine* was of supreme importance. An extract of his letter to Dilip Kumar Roy dated 16th June, 1948 read:

I think I wrote to you about your *Among the Great*, saying how much I liked the section on Sri Aurobindo and how helpful I found it.

Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* I have not yet read but if I see Blum or Gide [*André Gide — Nobel Prize winner of Literature, 1947*] in France and I expect to be in that country for a short time this summer — I will find out what is being done about the Nobel Prize recommendation and add a word of my own, if they think that would be of any avail, in favour of Sri Aurobindo's *Life Divine*, which I regard as a book not merely of the highest importance as regards its content, but remarkably fine as a piece of philosophic and religious literature.²

Earlier in 1946, in his book *The Perennial Philosophy*, Huxley had quoted and commented on the following passage from Sri Aurobindo's *Life Divine*, pp. 13-14: "The touch of Earth is always reinvigorating to the son of Earth, even when he seeks a supraphysical Knowledge. It may even be said that the supraphysical can only be really mastered in its fullness — to its heights we can always reach — when we keep our feet firmly on the physical. 'Earth is His footing,' says the Upanishad whenever it images the Self that manifests in the universe."³ In response to Huxley's comment Sri Aurobindo wrote in a letter, where he refers to himself in the third person:

Sri Aurobindo has no remarks to make on Huxley's comments with which he is in entire agreement. But in the phrase "to its heights we can always reach" very obviously "we" does not refer to humanity in general but to those who have a sufficiently developed inner spiritual life. It is probable that Sri Aurobindo was thinking of his own experience.⁴

2. 'Aldous Huxley on Sri Aurobindo', *Mother India*, August 1965, p. 10.

3. See *CWSA*, Vol. 35, p. 258 fn by editors.

4. *Ibid.*, Vol. 29, p. 406.

In 1949 Sri Aurobindo's name was proposed for the Nobel Prize in Literature by Gabriela Mistral, the 1945 Nobel laureate in Literature, and seconded by Pearl S. Buck, the 1938 Nobel laureate in Literature. A statement, reproduced below, supporting Sri Aurobindo's nomination was signed by 36 leading citizens and intellectuals of India which included several Governors, Central ministers, Chief Ministers, Academicians (of whom 16 held the post of either a Chancellor or a Vice-Chancellor of one of the reputed Universities in India), Maharajas and others. The nomination letter read:

The President,
Svenska Akademien,
Stockholm, Sweden.

1949

Dear Sir,

Sri Aurobindo is held in deep reverence in India and other parts of the world. We, his countrymen and admirers, look up to him as one who shares the vision of the Great Ones of all ages and who belongs to the galaxy of "just men made perfect". With his divine, cosmic vision and a life breathing forth the fragrance of holiness, Sri Aurobindo has given us a glimpse, unparalleled for its profundity and sublimity, of the occult significance of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagawad Gita. Through his writings he has revealed to us once again the pathway of experiencing the Real and the Eternal. This pathway is the Integral Yoga, the simultaneous divinisation of consciousness and matter in the various dimensions of the human personality. The story of the grand strategy of Evolution through which the Supreme Being fulfils Himself in the multifarious forms of manifestation constitutes the core of this universal drama of the Becoming. Poetry has become, in Sri Aurobindo's hands, an instrument of articulating the celestial music, the ecstasy of the Infinite, and the whole system of Sri Aurobindo's thought is a superb edifice, a majestic summation of the Laws of the inner and the outer worlds in which the Eternal continues to exert pressure on all orders and aggregates of Life to ascend heavenward in an orchestration of a unified, co-operative movement, thus helping man to divest himself of the separative, egoistic, communalistic and nationalistic tendencies and to regain a living faith in the ideal of unity of all life.

Sri Aurobindo's profound and penetrating analysis of the fundamentals of Indian Culture and his vision of India's glorious destiny of being the meeting-place of the best of the East and the West have awakened us to the opulent spiritual heritage that belongs to us and the part that India has to play in the destiny of mankind. We look up to Sri Aurobindo as belonging to the family of the Seers and Sages of the world whose line has never ended and whose

majesty of soul will continue to shed lustre on all parts of the world and at all times. It is, therefore, a source of great pleasure to us to bring to your attention his contribution and to commend to your favourable consideration the proposal to award the Nobel Prize in Literature to Sri Aurobindo

Yours faithfully,

Hon. Shri Gopalswami Ayyangar, Minister for Transport, Govt. of India
 Hon. Shri N. V. Gadgil, Minister for Works, Mines and Power, Govt. of India
 Hon. Shri Jairamdas Daulatram, Minister for Food and Agriculture, Govt. of India
 Hon. Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, Minister for Industry & Supply, Govt. of India
 Hon. Shri K. C. Neogy, Minister for Commerce, Govt. of India
 His Excellency Shri M. S. Aney, Governor of Bihar, Chancellor, Patna University
 Hon. Dr. S. K. Sinha, Premier, Bihar Government
 His Excellency Shri Chandulal Trivedi, Governor of East Punjab & Chancellor, East Punjab University
 Hon. Shri Bhimsen Sachar, Premier, East Punjab Government
 His Excellency Shri Mangaldas Pakvasa, Governor of Central Provinces and Chancellor of Nagpur University
 Hon. Shri Harekrishna Mehtab, Premier, Orissa Government
 Hon. Shri Govind Vallabh Pant, Premier, United Provinces Government
 His Highness the Maharaja of Gwalior, Rajpramukh of Madhyabharat Union
 His Highness the Maharaja of Patiala, Rajpramukh of East Punjab Union
 His Highness the Maharaja of Rewa, Rajpramukh of Vindhya Pradesh Union
 Dr. Asthana, Vice-Chancellor, Agra University
 Dr. D. R. Bhattacharya, Vice-Chancellor, Allahabad University
 Dr. C. R. Reddy, Vice-Chancellor, Andhra University
 Dr. Manvala Ramanujam, Vice-Chancellor, Annamalai University
 Dr. P. Parija, Vice-Chancellor, Benaras Hindu University
 Dr. P. V. Kane, Vice-Chancellor, University of Bombay
 Dr. P. N. Banerjee, Vice-Chancellor, Calcutta University
 Shri R. Kasturiraj Chetty, Vice-Chancellor, University of Mysore
 Dr. Sir M. Bhawani Shankar Neogy, former Vice-Chancellor, Nagpur University
 Shri Ali Yar Jung, Vice-Chancellor, Osmania University
 Sir C. P. N. Singh, Vice-Chancellor, Patna University
 Hon. Sir Teja Singh, Vice-Chancellor, East Punjab University
 Shri C. N. Acharya, Vice-Chancellor, Utkal University
 Shri A. S. Bharatan, General Manager, Press Trust of India
 Shri James H. Cousins, Poet, Dramatist, Art-Critic

Shri Tushar Kanti Ghosh, Editor, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta
 Acharya J. B Kripalani, Ex-President of the Indian National Congress
 Shrimati Clara Motwani, Principal, Buddhist Women's College, Colombo
 Dr. Kewal Motwani, Visiting Lecturer to American, Indian and Far Eastern Universities
 Shri Jamshed Nusserwanjee, former Mayor, Karachi Municipality
 Dr. D. N Wadia, Director, Bureau of Mines and Geological Adviser, Government of India⁵

A news story of the above was featured in the 12th August, 1949 issue of *The Hindu*:

NOBEL PRIZE AWARD FOR LITERATURE Sri Aurobindo's Name Being Proposed

The name of Sri Aurobindo, the well-known sage and seer of India, is being proposed for the award of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1950, by Madame Gabriela Mistral, Nobel Laureate of Chile, and seconded by Miss Pearl S. Buck, Nobel Laureate of the USA, it is learnt here.

A memorial supporting Sri Aurobindo's nomination bearing the signatures of several prominent Indians is also being submitted to the Swedish Academy of Literature. — PTI.

And *The Nation* of 15th August 1949 reported:

NOBEL PRIZE FOR SRI AUROBINDO

The name of Sri Aurobindo, it is reported, has been suggested by Madame Gabriela Mistral, Nobel Laureate of Chile and seconded by Pearl S. Buck, Nobel Laureate of the U.S.A, for the award of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1950. A memorial signed by several prominent Indians, supporting the nomination has also been submitted to the Swedish Academy of Literature. As a work of supreme literary embellishment, as a potential source of spiritual inspirations and as a true record of man's noble aspirations and his destiny, Sri Aurobindo's *Life Divine* will always be regarded as a monumental piece of work in the history of world-literature. His *Kalidas*, *The Superman*, *Thoughts and Glimpses*, *Riddle of the World* and many of his poetical works show the indisputed proofs of rare literary qualities. But to think of Sri Aurobindo merely

5. 'Nomination Letter for the Nobel Prize for Sri Aurobindo in 1950', *Mother India*, January 1994, pp. 13-15.

as a literary artist is to limit his personality; and the award, if made, will in fact honour *Life Divine* in which Sri Aurobindo has so profound faith.⁶

Earlier a report of *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, dated 6th June, 1949, under the title ‘Nobel Laureate to Propose Sri Aurobindo’s Name’ read:

The “Patrika” understands that Madam Gabriela Mistral, the Nobel Laureate in Literature of Chile, South America, has, it is understood, offered to propose Sri Aurobindo for Nobel Prize in Literature. The proposal will be supported by eminent personalities of India and abroad.

Madam Mistral is at present engaged in writing an appreciation of Sri Aurobindo’s contribution in the literature and thought of the world. She has expressed her intention of coming to India at the earliest opportunity in order, among other things, to spend some time at the Ashram of Sri Aurobindo.

It may be recalled that last year in the course of an interview in New York with the Indian journalist Sri S. Chandrasekhar, Madam Mistral was reported to have said that Sri Aurobindo’s was one of the greatest influences in her life. “He opened the way to my religious consecration.”⁷

About his meeting with Mistral, S. Chandrasekhar, a Ph.D. in Sociology from New York University who started the Indian Institute for Population Studies in 1950, writes:

... she explained the formative influences in her life. “My personal religious life has been largely influenced by the teachings of Buddha, Christ, St Francis of Assisi, and Aurobindo. While Tagore’s poetry awakened the latent muse in me in the midst of great personal sorrow, another Indian — Aurobindo — brought me to religion. It may sound quaint that a non-Christian Indian should have opened the way to my religious consecration, but Aurobindo did. It is a pity that we in Latin America and the West in general know so little about him.”

“Have you met Aurobindo?” she asked. I replied that I had not had the opportunity. “Every people must have an Aurobindo, a man far above the people and yet identified with the aspirations of the people.”⁸

A news item in *The Hindu* dated August 7, 1949, under the title ‘Sri Aurobindo’s Birthday’, covered Pearl S. Buck’s involvement in proposing Sri Aurobindo’s name for the Nobel Prize:

6. *The Nation*, Monday, August 15, 1949.

7. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Monday, June 6, 1949.

8. S. Chandrasekhar, *The Aryan Path*, p. 62.

Mrs. Pearl S. Buck, the famous author, has agreed to preside over the 77th birthday celebrations of Sri Aurobindo to be held here on August 15.

The Sri Aurobindo Library, New York, will publish the American edition of his magnum opus, *The Life Divine*, on the same day.

Mrs. Pearl Buck has also offered to propose the name of Sri Aurobindo for the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature.⁹

Further, *The Indian Express* of 25th July, 1949, wrote under the title ‘Nobel Prize for Literature — Pearl Buck to Propose Sri Aurobindo’s Name’:

Mrs Pearl S. Buck, the famous author and Nobel Prize winner has, it is learnt, offered to propose the name of Sri Aurobindo for the award to him of the Nobel Prize for literature.

The U.S.A. is taking a steadily increasing interest in the writings of Sri Aurobindo, according to reports received here.

The Sri Aurobindo Library, New York, will celebrate the 77th birthday of the saint by publishing an American edition of his Magnum Opus the “Life Divine” on August 15 next.

The library hopes to publish four of his major works in the course of the next six months, the books being *Essays on the Gita*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Human Cycle* and *The Ideal of Human Unity*.¹⁰

In 1949 Dr. Juan Marin, author of thirty-four books and Chile’s Chargé d’Affaires in India, visited the Ashram to inform Sri Aurobindo that Gabriela Mistral had proposed his name for the Nobel Prize. Marin writes in the April 1950 issue of *Mother India* under the title “New Trends in Western Thought — Sri Aurobindo: Mystic and Philosopher of India”:

A letter from Mexico, by the Nobel Laureate Gabriela Mistral, put me in touch with Sri Aurobindo and his Ashram, that is to say, his School, Shrine and Place of Retreat. It is in his Ashram that the world-renowned “Guru” has lived in seclusion since the day many years ago when he “left the world” to dedicate himself exclusively to the spiritual life. To reach Sri Aurobindo, one has to cross the frontiers of India and enter the small French territory of Pondicherry, in the south-east coast of India, a territory totally animated, like the whole of Asia, by strong winds of nationalism and liberation. In that little town, “The Sage of Pondicherry” lives in silence impenetrable, listening to the pulsations of the worlds, visible and invisible. There, through us, the news of Gabriela

9. *The Hindu*, Sunday, August 7, 1949.

10. *The Indian Express*, Monday, July 25, 1949.

Mistral, our illustrious compatriot, nominating him for the award of Nobel Prize for Literature next year, reached him.

We have here before us the splendid literary works of Sri Aurobindo that fully justify such a high distinction: his magnificent *Essays on the Gita*, his brief, deep and almost cryptogrammatic book, *The Mother*, the first volume of his *Synthesis of Yoga*, and his superb masterpiece, *The Life Divine*, which is the climax and quintessence of his philosophy and mysticism. In transparent, lyrical prose, — it must be remembered that in his youth the author studied in one of the best English Universities, — Sri Aurobindo describes for us his realisation of the Divine and gives us his high moral lesson with rules of conduct for this world. Here is a strange example of a man who enters life as a revolutionary leader of the first rank, engages deeply in a struggle to death for the freedom of his country, hears suddenly, while being in the depths of a prison cell, the call of God, the appeal of the One, of the Great Mind of the Universe, towards new pathways. Knowing profoundly the Sacred Books of his race, the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas and the Sutras, and well-versed at the same time in the teachings enshrined in the Bible, the Koran and the Avesta, Sri Aurobindo gives himself up entirely, in 1910, to the objective of finding a divine life here on earth. Born in Calcutta in 1872, and sent by his father at an early age to complete his studies in Great Britain, Aurobindo joined in London a secret society, named “The Lotus and Dagger”, started by Hindu youths and dedicated to driving out the English from India by force. Once in India, young Aurobindo started on a career of diverse, dynamic activities: teacher in a college, editor of a high class weekly, speaker at public meetings, organiser of societies and leader of opposition to the government. He soon became the Public Enemy No. 1 of the Britishers.

But all that belongs to the past. Thirty-nine years ago, Sri Aurobindo, already well-versed in Yoga and vouchsafed a vision of the Divine while a prisoner in his cell, entered the life of introspection and meditation. After many years of silent practice, he arrived at the perfect comprehension of the Integral Divine Reality, through his great realisation of the Supermind. With the light of this prodigious revelation, he started writing interpretation of the Sacred Books of Hinduism, and his books are made of the purest spiritual gold.

But it would be wrong to believe that Sri Aurobindo has lost interest in the fate of his country; for, he always followed, step by step the movement for independence and resurgence of India and even now he watches the Indian nation’s many-sided career. On rare occasions he lets even his voice be clearly heard in favour of one course of action or another. The difference between the revolutionary fighter of old days and the mystic of today is that Sri Aurobindo applies himself to spiritual pursuits and relies mainly on the occult impact of his power to change the world. He believes that India is called to play a very

important role in the world tomorrow, particularly in all things concerning the establishment of peace and harmony among the nations. He also believes that the Indo-Aryan Culture of high philosophic and moral values will be reborn and carried to the world for the good of humanity and its future destiny. From that source of conviction comes his interest in an interpretation and diffusion of the Sacred Wisdom of Hinduism enshrined in the Upanishads and the Gita.

The writings of Sri Aurobindo do not always make easy reading. Often they demand an extraordinary mental concentration, a good knowledge of the English language and a relative understanding of Hindu philosophy, including some Sanskrit words. His teachings, to use Gabriela Mistral's expression, may seem like those high cliffs that one has to breast from the marine beach, cold, slippery, vertical and almost hostile in their stony lines. But, with all that, his books have no equals in the European literatures for their content of spiritual nourishment. Sri Aurobindo, the Seer of Pondicherry, is a sublime "Adelantado"¹¹ who travels and guides us toward worlds of which we have only a pale glimmer at present.¹²

Interestingly, we have on our records a letter that Pavitra (P. B. Saint-Hilaire) wrote to Dr. Juan Marin on 28th July, 1954:

Dear Sir,

The Mother has asked me to acknowledge receipt on her behalf of your letter dated June the 6th and the newspaper clipping enclosed in it. Unfortunately there was, at that time, no inmate of the Ashram capable of reading Spanish. This will explain the delay in writing to you, for which delay I apologise.

We have been very interested in your excellent article on Sri Aurobindo and appreciate your effort to introduce Sri Aurobindo's philosophy in South America. The biographic account and the broad outline of Sri Aurobindo's teaching are quite accurate and apposite. In spite of the courageous and enthusiastic initiative of Gabriela Mistral, very little is known of our Master in that part of the world, so potent for the future of humanity.

We remain at your disposal if you desire any book by Sri Aurobindo which you might need for further studies. We are sending you the latest catalogues of English and French books.

We had recently the visit of Sr. Miguel Serano, the present Chargé d'Affaires of your country in Delhi and we had much pleasure in meeting him.

11. A Spanish word meaning 'one who goes before', an explorer, a pioneer — Ed.

12. Dr. Juan Marin, 'New Trends in Western Thought – Sri Aurobindo: Mystic and Philosopher of India', *Mother India*, 1st April, 1950, p. 12.

The Mother remembers your visit here and is sending you her blessing.
 With the hope that you will be able to come once again [to] India and Pondicherry, I remain.

Yours sincerely
 General Secretary
 Sri Aurobindo Asram
 Pondicherry
 P. B. Saint-Hilaire.

P.S. Eventually can we write to you in French?¹³

As regards the proposal for the Nobel Prize for Literature, Sri Aurobindo finally was nominated for the 1950 Nobel Peace Prize instead. *Mother India* in its special number on 15th August, 1949, published a report from the Bombay edition of *The Times of India*:

Sri Aurobindo

A special number, on August 15, of the new fortnightly review, Mother India, commemorates the 77th birthday of Sri Aurobindo, which synchronises with Independence Day, an auspicious omen since his name has recently been suggested for the Nobel Peace Prize [*for 1950*].

Poet and philosopher, scholar of both Eastern and Western cultures, once an ardent politician and now withdrawn from the world, a master of yoga with a message of dynamic spirituality, seeking not to reject life but to transform it, his significance in the shaping of India's future may prove more weighty than that of statesmen. (*The Times of India*, "Current Topics", August 1949)¹⁴

An article featured on Sri Aurobindo on the website of the University of Cambridge states that Aldous Huxley recommended Sri Aurobindo for a Nobel Peace Prize in 1950.¹⁵

Sri Aurobindo was categorically nominated for the 1950 Nobel Peace Prize. His nomination was submitted by Saileshwar Sen, a Professor of philosophy at the Andhra University, to the Nobel committee. Sen enclosed a printed message of Sri Aurobindo and a speech made by Sri Aurobindo and also included a bibliography. The committee filed Sri Aurobindo's profession as poet, nationalist and pacifist. There were 21 persons in all who were nominated for the 1950 Nobel Peace Prize.

13. Website: <http://www.bibliotecanacionaldigital.gob.cl/bnd/623/w3-article-582828.html/30.10.2022>

14. Quoted in 'A Page from the Early Days of *Mother India*', *Mother India*, July 2009, p. 563.

15. Website: <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/features/spiritual-violence-and-the-divine-revolution-of-sri-aurobindo-ghosh/30.10.2022>

The nominees included three other Indians namely Sanjib Chaudhuri — a jurist who was nominated for his book *A Constitution for World Government* — Jawaharlal Nehru and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan.¹⁶

In 1962 the Mother revealed to a disciple:

Some people wanted to get me nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize; I was asked for a statement and that's what I wrote ["I am only realising what He has conceived. I am only the protagonist and the continuator of His work."]. I wanted to say that it wasn't this person who did things — it was all Sri Aurobindo.

They had wanted to give the Nobel Prize to Sri Aurobindo, but he left the year before the decision was to be made. And as they don't give the prize to "dead" people, he never got it. Then they wanted to transfer it to me, and I wrote this note, because the last thing I want is name and fame. That's all there was to it. They didn't give a peace prize that year.

I believe the whole affair is now buried and forgotten.¹⁷

GAUTAM MALAKER

16. Website: <https://www.nobelprize.org/nomination/archive/show.php?id=263/30.10.2022>

17. Mother's conversation with a disciple on 15 May 1962.

The work for which the Avatar descends has like his birth a double sense and a double form. It has an outward side of the divine force acting upon the external world in order to maintain there and to reshape the divine law by which the Godward effort of humanity is kept from decisive retrogression and instead decisively carried forward in spite of the rule of action and reaction, the rhythm of advance and relapse by which Nature proceeds. It has an inward side of the divine force of the Godward consciousness acting upon the soul of the individual and the soul of the race, so that it may receive new forms of revelation of the Divine in man and may be sustained, renewed and enriched in its power of upward self-unfolding.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Essays on the Gita*, CWSA, Vol. 19, p. 168)

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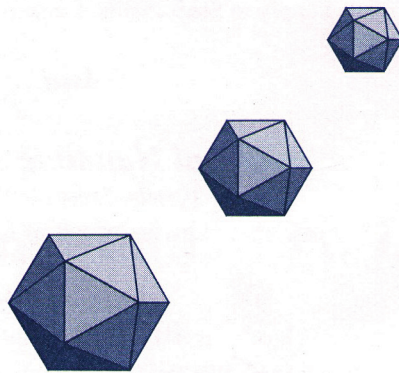
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